

Fen's First Term

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FEN'S FIRST TERM

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Fen's First Term

By

DOROTHEA MOORE

Author of "An Adventurous Schoolgirl"
"Septima, Schoolgirl," etc.

With Four Illustrations in
Colour and Black-and-White

CASELL AND COMPANY, LIMITED
London, New York, Toronto and
Melbourne

First published 1924

Printed in Great Britain

To
EDITH,

In memory of a journey, specially,
I dedicate this book.



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Fen's First Term

CHAPTER I

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR

THE grand finale of the circus had come. The band struck up "Rule Britannia," and Fenella standing, a slim boyish little figure in close-fitting dark green jacket and breeches, in the centre of the great cage, lifted her right hand and let fly the Union Jack. At the accustomed signal the two great lions, Nimrod and Alexander, rose on their haunches upon either side of her; while Roy, old and half blind, but still majestic, a veritable king of beasts, crossed the cage and lay down at her feet; and in the midst of all that brute force—Fenella, fourteen to-day, but looking less, and the Union Jack!

"Rule Britannia" crashed out, audible in snatches only, because of the deafening thunder of applause greeting this final exhibition of the "World-famous Child Lion-Tamer and Her Pets."

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Then, at last, the curtains of the cage were drawn, shrouding the tableau from view, and the excited audience began to move reluctantly away.

Inside the cage Fenella relaxed her attitude of attention, and handed her flag through the bars to one of the anxiously watchful attendants. Then she put an arm round the great necks of Nimrod and Alexander—even Fenella the fearless knew that it was safer not to handle Roy.

“You old darlings, you do it all better and better every time!” she said softly, fondling each of the great lions in turn. But she was careful to turn her back on neither.

“Fen, you little villain, come out of it at once!” a man’s voice called with authority, and the cage door opened a little way on the right side. A tall man stood in the opening he had made; a tall man with queer eyes of greenish hazel and thick hair, once black, now greying fast upon the temples. His left sleeve was pinned across his chest. He wore the dress of a trainer, and carried a slender whip; but Andrew Ferne, Fenella’s father, had not entered the lions’ cage to-night. The Child Lion-Tamer was a far more popular figure with circus audiences to-day than he had ever been, and

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Fen was so absolutely fearless that she never felt the need of his protection.

But he was always there, none the less, close at the point where the bars slid back, ready to spring instantly to the rescue, should any of the lions turn nasty, a contingency which, luckily perhaps, had never struck Fenella. She never could imagine why her father was always in such a hurry to get her out of the cage at once, directly her "stunt" was over. She knew, of course, that Roy was sometimes uncertain as to temper if he had a cold or his teeth were troubling him; but she could do anything with Nimrod and Alexander, and loved them with her whole heart.

She took two rules into the cage with her: a lion-tamer must never be afraid, and must never turn her back. Father had taught her those two things; the rest just came, because she loved the great beasts with whom it was her job to perform. It was most unwillingly this evening that she backed towards her father and the opening in the cage by which he stood.

"All right, daddy; but Nimrod and Alex were absolutely *it* to-night; they do deserve a little petting. Are you in a fearful hurry for your supper?"

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Andrew Ferne pulled her through the narrow opening and pushed back the bars, locking them carefully. He gave a little half-smile at her question.

"No; I don't want my supper, Fen; but there is a hurry all the same. Go and change, and look slippy, old lady."

The manager, red-faced and shiny-haired, garbed in immaculate (too immaculate) evening dress, patted her approvingly upon the shoulder. "Capital, capital, Miss Fenella! You did us first-class business to-night. I shall have to think of raising your salary."

Fenella flushed happily. "Oh, Mr. Nevill, how awfully kind! Will you really? Daddy's getting that horrid cough again, and he ought to have some of that expensive medicine the doctor ordered last year for him. If I'm really a draw, I wish you would raise us now, right off, before his cough gets worse."

Her father spoke sharply, before the manager had time to answer. "Nonsense, Fen; you know nothing about it. You don't want a rise. Make haste and change."

Father spoke irritably, and Fen's eyebrows drew together as she darted off obediently into one of the swaying canvas passages leading to

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the little dressing-room which she shared with Zuletta, who performed wonderful equestrian feats on her Arab mare, and Mademoiselle Mignon, the smallest woman in the world, who drove round the ring a four-in-hand of grey Persian cats, harnessed to a doll's coach, amid tumultuous applause, especially from children in the audience, who were generally under the impression that Mademoiselle Mignon was a doll come mysteriously to life. The idea was doubtless assisted by the way in which Mademoiselle Mignon was dressed—she wore a white frock and blue sash, and her fair hair was arranged in long curled ringlets, while her little face was painted to show a pink and white of wax-like delicacy.

Mademoiselle Mignon was standing on the table, being dressed by her maid, when Fen came in. Seen close, she did not look at all like a doll, or even a little girl, but only a tired little woman, no longer very young, who wanted warm clothes and her supper.

Zuletta, who was in private life Miss Daisy Jones, was still dressed in her spangled robes, and too busy taking the make-up off her face with a greasy rag to take any notice of the child, whom she chose to consider in the way; but

the dwarf turned round to greet Fen with a kind smile.

“Well, my dear, how did it go to-night? I heard the applause, but I was too tired and cold to wait. This muslin frock is so thin.”

The poor little woman's tiny arms were quite blue with cold. Fen looked at her pitifully. “Couldn't you get hold of the boss when he's in a good temper and ask him to let you wear something warmer?” she suggested. “One of those little knitted frocks: a baby's would fit you, wouldn't it? And we could get it ready made. It's awfully draughty in the ring, I know; I get the best of it these cold nights in the cage.”

“I'm afraid the boss wouldn't hear of it,” shivered the dwarf. “He thinks this get-up pleases the public, and you know what it is when he gets an idea into his head. Nothing else matters.”

“Well, do try. He's in such a good temper to-night,” Fen said hopefully, beginning to unbutton her jacket as she spoke. “Just think! He offered me a rise all on his own. Of course, we've done ever so well at this place; we've been full every night, daddy says, so no wonder

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the boss is so out of the common pleasant. Still——”

A furious voice came storming down the passage towards the dressing-room. Fen would hardly have recognized it for the voice which had spoken so graciously to her just now, if it were not that, in common with the rest of the circus company, she had met Mr. Nevill's temper on more than one occasion during her short life. He was abusing someone in no measured terms ; in fact, there seemed to be a perfect crescendo of fury.

“ The boss's good temper doesn't seem to have been of a very lasting quality,” Mademoiselle Mignon remarked dryly. “ I don't think I shall take this opportunity of proffering my request about the warmer frock, my dear.”

Fen, changing rapidly, as she had been told, from her trainer's garb into a short brown tweed skirt and yellow knitted jumper, listened with a troubled look upon her small face. It wasn't that she was afraid of Mr. Nevill, but she realized that it must be father who, in the circus vernacular, was “ getting it in the neck.” And father had been tired and worried enough before ; too tired even to be pleased at her proffered rise. She listened—as indeed everyone in the dressing

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room was forced to do—for the boss was storming at the top of his always raucous voice.

“Don’t you imagine that you’re going to keep a soft job here if we don’t keep the child ! I could get a dozen more efficient men without your confounded cough for half your screw in a week or two. If you let me down like this in the height of our business, you needn’t think that you can come whining to me later on to keep you from the workhouse. You—you——”

“That’s enough. I’ve decided. Fenella goes,” came her father’s voice, speaking not loudly, but decidedly. “Ready, Fen ? ”

Fenella caught up her mackintosh and ran out to her father, without waiting to say good-bye to Mademoiselle Mignon or the spangled Zuletta. Daddy sounded as though he were in a desperate hurry, and she would see her little world, the circus world, again in the morning. He was extra tired, she thought ; he had seldom been anything else but tired since he was gassed in the last year but one of the war, and returned with damaged health and nerves to the only job he knew. He probably wanted to get back at once to the little lodging-house where he had taken rooms for himself and Fen for the week the circus was in Rothbury. Perhaps he

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had remembered that there might be a hot supper waiting for them, since Mrs. Renton, their landlady, had been presented with complimentary tickets for the "show" to-night, and would certainly be up and probably in a good temper.

"Here I am, dad, and I've hurried all right, haven't I?" she said cheerfully, hoping to divert the storm.

Mr. Nevill, his face many degrees redder than usual, turned on her explosively. "Yes, here you are, and what do you think your fool of a father wants you for in such an all-fired hurry? Why, to take you away from the circus for good and all—as though salaries like you earn were picked up on every blackberry bush. Take you away! He must have gone crazy!"

"I don't know what on earth you mean; but of course if my daddy has arranged something about me it's sure to be right," Fen answered him hotly; then, as the meaning of his words came back, "But you're never going to take me away from Nimrod and Alexander, are you, daddy?"

Andrew Ferne was very pale, and his eyes looked strained. "Yes, Fen, I am."

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“ Oh, daddy, why ? ” That was all poor Fen could find to say just then.

Her father answered her very quietly, disregarding Nevill's furious interruption. “ Because—because there is a promise to be kept, little girl. Don't ask anything more now, but come with me. There's something for you—on the other side of the door.”

The door at the other end of this canvas passage gave on to the road, Fenella knew. She let her father take her by the hand and lead her down it—too much bewildered by the strangeness of everything to speak.

It was Saturday night, and the circus was on the move. Gas jets were flaring everywhere as men pulled the whole great erection to pieces, in preparation for packing it into the huge vans that would take it to the next pitch. But this passage was untouched as yet, and Fenella was within the bounds of the circus still.

The two walked together to the ending of the passage ; Andrew Ferne put his arm round his child for a moment, and drew her close ; then opened the rickety door and pushed her gently through it, shutting it behind her.

He remained in—Fenella was outside.

CHAPTER II

WHAT SHE FOUND THERE

THERE was trampled slush underfoot, as Fen had expected. What she had not expected was the great covered car that stood there at the door, dazzling her with the brilliance of its headlights ; nor the beautiful lady wrapped in splendid furs, who held out loving arms to draw her in.

“Come in, come in, my poor little Fenella ; you must be nearly frozen.”

Fen drew back. “I—I don’t understand.”

“Didn’t your father explain to you that you are to jump into the car and come with me, my dear little niece ?” the beautiful lady said gently. “Never mind, you will soon understand. Come now, because it is his wish.”

She drew the girl into the car. Fen felt some warm delicious fur-lined wrap flung over her shabby, much-worn mackintosh. “Did father say I was to go with you ?” she asked, bewildered.

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"Yes, dear child, and he has given me a letter for you which you shall read presently. Here it is," the lady said. "Don't be frightened, dear child. You mustn't be afraid of me. I am your own aunt, your mother's sister Frances."

"I'm not afraid," Fen said, as the car slid noiselessly away, leaving the flaring lights of the half-dismantled circus behind it. "I'm never afraid—but I want to know when I can go back?"

"Your father's letter will tell you everything, dear," this surprising new aunt said, and Fenella had to be content with that, for there was not light enough to read her father's letter in the car.

She held on tightly to the square thick envelope and thought.

Daddy had been rather odd for days, and had always hushed her when she talked of future plans—plans which were to happen after her fourteenth birthday, when there would be fewer regulations to be complied with, and no inspectors "worrying," as she put it. She would be more use to the circus, and therefore more help to the father she adored, when she had passed that fourteenth birthday; it had been distinctly

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disappointing that daddy would not talk about it. She had been so anxious to keep the promise made seven years ago to her pretty delicate mother, to take care of father when she herself should not be there. Fen had taken care of him to the best of her powers ever since, and now he was sending her from him to those unknown relations of whom mother had now and then told stories in those old days which were growing so far away and misty.

Fen knew that mother had been brought up in a big house, set in lovely woods, and that there were dogs and horses, and a boat in which she and Aunt Frances used to row upon the great lake; but all those things were so far from the circus life, and the canvas dressing-rooms, and the cheap lodgings where one stayed, that they had always seemed to Fen almost as much fairy stories as Cinderella or Jack and the Beanstalk themselves. And mother had died when she was only seven. She had hardly ever thought of those stories since.

Aunt Frances laid her gloved hand upon Fen's, which was cold and bare and none too clean. "I am longing for the light, that I may see if you take after your dear mother at all, Fenella. Did she ever talk to you about Aunt

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Frances ? Did she ever tell you what great friends we two were—always ? ”

“ Yes,” Fen said. “ She told me about you and the boat, and the swan that had such a bad temper, and ever so many things.”

Aunt Frances kissed her in the darkness, rather to Fen's disgust. She hated kissing. “ My dear, I am so glad she told you. Then we shan't start as strangers, you and I. We are going to be great friends, I think, Fenella.”

Poor Fen could not think what to say. To tell this new-found aunt that she didn't suppose they would see enough of each other for that sort of thing would sound so rude, and—yet—Fen could not imagine Aunt Frances, with her beautiful furs, and her splendid car, in the neighbourhood of Nevill's circus. She took refuge in silence.

“ Grandfather is longing to see you,” her new aunt went on. “ You mustn't be afraid if he speaks rather abruptly ; he was a soldier, you know, and is accustomed to command. But your dear mother was his favourite child, and he will be so fond of you when he knows you.”

Again that queer certainty that these new grand relations were having something very

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definite to do with her future life. "But I——" Fen began, and then stopped. It would be better to read father's letter first; father was her pal; he would not leave her in the dark as to what all these mysterious happenings might mean.

"And there is Angela," Aunt Frances said, "Let me see, you are just fourteen, Fenella, so your father told us. Then Angela must be a year older; however, I am sure you will be tremendous friends."

"Who is she, please?" Fenella asked.

Her aunt laughed softly in the darkness. "My dear, how odd it seems that you should have to ask about your own first cousin. But of course you cannot know about the young generation. Angela is your Uncle Cedric's child; he was killed in the war, and grandfather asked Aunt Rosalind to bring Angela and come to live at the castle. There is plenty of room for us all, and such a pretty room all ready for you, Fenella—next to Angela's."

A comment of some sort seemed to be expected. "Thank you so much," Fen said very properly. "Then am I to stay the night? I wish I had known before, for I don't suppose for a moment that Mrs. Renton will fry the

sausages enough for daddy. He likes them ever so crisp—almost burnt.”

There was a little pause; then Aunt Frances said, “Oh, yes; you are certainly staying for the night, my dear.”

The car pulled up; there were lights in a latticed window, and somebody ran out. There was a sound of something being drawn back; great ornamental iron gates showed for a moment in the strong glare of the head-lights.

“The North Lodge,” said Aunt Frances.

The car was running more smoothly; there was a very well-made road beneath it. “Are we just there?” asked Fen.

“Oh, no; the avenue is three miles long,” Aunt Frances explained, and Fen gave a little gasp in the darkness. Her aunt took her hand and held it fast.

“Of course, it must seem rather strange; but we are all wanting you, Fenella.”

After that there was silence, while Fen clung on tightly to daddy’s letter, and felt very odd indeed. And then the car stopped; there was a blaze of light on a broad flight of grey stone steps, and a tall, stern-looking old man, with thick white hair, was coming down them. Somewhere in the background of the great

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doorway were other figures, but Fenella only looked at the old man. He was her mother's father, she was sure—the grandfather of whom she must not be afraid.

She stood up, shook off the fur coat, got out of the car, and stood there at the foot of the great flight of stone steps facing him—a shabby little figure in her old mackintosh, and with a woollen tammy, minus its tassel, pulled down all anyhow over her thick dark bobbed hair.

“How do you do, grandfather?” she said.

Her grandfather laid his two hands upon her shoulders, and looked down at her without speaking for a minute. Then he said, “Welcome, my dear,” and led her up the steps as though she were a princess come home to her kingdom.

There were several people in the huge hall, with its great log fire. A lady in a wonderful evening dress; a girl a good deal taller than Fen was, who also wore beautiful clothes and gave a rather supercilious glance, Fen thought, at the new arrival; a little elderly lady, who gave an impression of kindly fussiness, and was addressed as Miss Harwood by Aunt Frances, whose governess she had been, it seemed; a tall man in a dinner jacket. The two ladies

kissed Fenella as she stood passively among them, blinking in the light that seemed so dazzling after the long driving in the darkness, and, in part as well, at the unexpectedness of it all.

Aunt Frances seemed to see how it was with her. "She is tired out, poor child. I will take her straight upstairs. Angela darling, ring for Gunter," she directed. "You will excuse us, won't you, father? Fenella ought to have been in bed long ago."

Fenella went, still passively. She was desperately tired, and she wanted, above all things, to be left in peace to read her father's letter. So she let her new aunt take her by the hand and lead her up wide shallow stairs with wonderful twisted balustrades; along a gallery looking down into the great hall and through some corridors; then in at the door of a room which was so beautiful that she wondered vaguely how anybody, let alone a girl from a circus, could think of sleeping there for a single moment.

It had wonderful great windows, covered with long curtains of old rose in a lovely rich brocade; it had a carpet of the same shade, and a white fluffy fur rug before a blazing fire. There was an armchair, with big cushions, pulled

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up to the fire, and a little table standing by it, with a white embroidered cloth, and away at the other end a delicious-looking high white bed, covered with a white satin quilt all besprinkled with rose-buds. That was all Fen saw in her first glance, for the electric light was on, and her eyes had dropped to the square envelope that held her father's letter.

"You will like to read your letter first, dear," said her aunt, with ready sympathy. "I will leave you for a few minutes, and then Gunter will bring you something to eat and will afterwards help you to get to bed."

Fen tore her letter open; she did not even wait to take off the damp old mackintosh which seemed so out of place in this glorious room.

"I suppose in a way it has been unfair to spring all this upon you, little pal," her father wrote; "but I couldn't bear to tell you sooner than I need, and that's the truth. When your mother knew that she was dying, she asked a promise of me and I gave it. I mayn't be good for much, but I keep my word. Your mother ran away to marry me; her father was Lord Roswell, and I wasn't what he and his kind are pleased to call a gentleman. Your

mother didn't want you brought up to the circus business all your life; she asked me if I would write before you were fourteen to her sister, Frances, and ask if the family wished to have anything to do with you. She thought you ought to have your chance; I dare say she was right. Your aunt and your grandfather both wrote in answer and wrote kindly: they would bring you up and give you every advantage if I would make over all claim on you and only come to see you every three months and so forth. To make a long story short, I have agreed to these terms, and you're going to have your chance, my little girl. Just remember, if you don't like it much at first, that it's what your mother would have wanted for you—and that her people have offered generously, and you and I won't be quite cut off from each other. I shall come and see you, and by the end of three months I expect I shall know what I am going to do. I don't suppose I shall stay with Nevill, even if I don't get the chuck for taking you out of the business, as is most probable. But I shall worry through, as we've worried through most things so far, little pal. Keep smiling!—
YOUR LOVING FATHER."

WHAT SHE FOUND THERE

Fen was still standing on the hearthrug in that old mack, staring at the open letter that told so much and so little, when the door opened and a bright-faced old woman, dressed in rustling black silk, came into the room, carrying a covered basin of old china on a little silver tray. Fen wondered vaguely who in the world she could be.

“Now, my dear lamb, we must have your wet things off as soon as may be, and you supping this good bread and milk,” she said, in a kindly fussy way that was quite new to Fen, who had hardly ever been taken care of in her life, since her mother died. “Why, you’re as white as a sheet, and dear! dear! your shoes wet through, too! You’ll have a cold in the morning. You just slip into this dressing-gown and these slippers of Miss Angela’s; there, let me get at the laces—they’re all of a knot.”

She pushed the child gently down into the arm-chair, and knelt to deal with the tangled shoe-laces. Fen looked at her with dazed eyes. “Who are you, and why are you bothering about me, please?”

The old woman smiled very kindly. “I’m unter, that was nurse to your poor dear mamma and to Miss Frances too, and all the rest. And

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I'm very glad indeed, Miss Fenella, to see you in your rightful home, where you should be."

Poor Fen gave a little choke ; speaking was somehow difficult. "But it isn't my home—that's just it. You're all awfully kind, but it isn't my home!" she said.

CHAPTER III

GOOD-BYE TO THE OLD LIFE

FENELLA woke early next morning. She was inclined to think afterwards that it was the quietness which had wakened her. She was unused to the absolute deep quiet of a great secluded country house.

Her curtains had been drawn back and her windows opened by Aunt Frances when she came to tuck her up in bed last night, and a red winter sun was just beginning to look over the edge of the fir plantations which Fen could see as she lay in bed.

She moved cautiously, half inclined to think that it was all a dream and that she would wake with the movement to find herself in the little back bedroom at Mrs. Renton's lodgings, where the window wouldn't stay open unless you propped it with a hair-brush, and the tiny strip of carpet by the bed was ragged and colourless and dingy, and the bed had one infirm leg propped with a stool, and tipped up unless you moved very cautiously ; and you did your hair

in front of a tiny black-framed mirror hanging on the wall, that gave a distinctly distorted picture of the face which it reflected.

The sleeve of her night-dress was unfamiliar—a fine delicate sleeve, ending at the elbow in a frill; she remembered, now, that she had been provided with a night-dress of Angela's, and Angela's night-dresses were about as much unlike her own, as the room in which she had awakened was to the back bedroom at Mrs. Renton's lodgings in Rothbury. Then it wasn't a dream; it was all quite real. She sat up, and as she did so her father's letter underneath her pillow crackled and she remembered that she was outside the old life now for good and all—that she had been made over to these grand relations like a horse or a dog.

A little clock upon the mantelpiece struck seven with a sweet silver chime, and Fen jumped as though she had been shot. Seven was the hour by which the circus had to be packed and ready to start—at least all that part of it that travelled by road. Of course, the boss wouldn't trouble himself to get up at that hour; he and his crony, Signor Orlando, who rode three horses at once, would lounge down to the coffee-room of the Commercial Hotel where they were stay-

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ing and partake of a belated breakfast about the time the Rothbury people were going off to church, and presently take train to the town where next the circus was to perform. But the civic authorities would not hear of great vans trailing about the streets on a Sunday, even if the next site had not been close on twenty miles away. So the rank and file of the circus people had to turn out in the dark of the winter's morning and be under way for the long cold journey by seven o'clock.

Fen knew just what it was like; she had often done it before, for it was part of her father's work to travel in the huge van that held the lions' cage. She had often crouched there beside him, listening without a tremor to the roaring of the great beasts prowling restlessly and angrily about their narrow prison, but longing very acutely for the ending of the journey. Now they were doing it all without her, and she was sitting up in a luxurious bed, wide awake, and—she had never said good-bye to daddy.

Fen swung herself to the floor, shivering a little—but not much, for the room had been so thoroughly warmed overnight that it was not really cold. There had not very often been

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warm water to get up with at the cheap lodgings where she and daddy stayed, so there was no special hardship in getting up with cold, even on a January morning. She dressed at record pace, her heart throbbing fiercely with the sense of the race against time. She must just see daddy again and say good-bye; she could not wait for a whole long three months. And yesterday, when the company had been talking of the early start and grumbling about the discomforts of the long, long journey, Zuletta had remarked that they passed within three miles of the castle and might catch a glimpse of it through the trees, if they weren't all too tired and too cold to look. Fen had remembered that; if she dressed like the wind and ran like the wind she might just cut them off.

She flung her old clothes on all anyhow, but to find her way downstairs and out was not such a simple matter. She was bewildered by the great corridors down which she had come with the guiding of Aunt Frances last night; finally she found her way to a back staircase and so out to a much smaller door than the one through which she had come before. It was open, and somebody seemed to have been sweeping the steps, for a broom stood there. That sight

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hurried Fen's footsteps; she did not wish to be stopped.

She ran breathlessly down a flagged path, and found herself in a big tiled stable-yard.

For all her haste, Fen could not help just pausing to look. Later on she knew that her grandfather detested motor-cars, and only kept them for the use of his family; the beautiful sleek pair of carriage horses were his, and the -cob which went in the high dog-cart that he drove himself, and the two hunters, and the beautiful roan mare that he rode about the lanes and fields of his country home.

It was at this last that Fen stopped to look with such intense admiration. She loved all animals and could do more with Signor Orlando's three horses than he could, any day of the week. The beautiful mare had just been led out to be groomed, for a pail and curry-comb and other paraphernalia of her toilet were beside her, and she was lightly tethered to a ring in the wall. Probably her groom had gone indoors to fetch something.

Fen stroked the glossy neck, and the lovely creature, after a momentary start of suspicion, seemed to recognize her, and dropped her head upon the girl's shoulder, softly licking her

cheek. They exchanged amenities for a minute ; then Fen remembered the time. She looked at the mare and had an inspiration. Why shouldn't she ride ? It would save so much time.

She unfastened the halter, led the mare under a low wall, climbed it, and flung her leg neatly across the roan without giving her time to jib away. Once up she was all right ; leaning forward, she turned the beautiful head with her hands, and walked the mare carefully over the rather slippery tiles of the stable-yard and out of the big gates just as a startled groom appeared on the scene. Fen did not wait to reassure him, for she was haunted by a dreadful fear of being too late for that good-bye to the old life and the old friends, and, above all, to daddy. Gripping easily with her knees, and guiding the beautiful sweet-tempered mare with a hand on each side of the satiny head, she put her at a gallop over the wet grass of the park, cutting, as far as she could tell, straight across in a bee-line for the high road.

She was right in her guess. As she came to the confines of the park, she saw above the hedges a serpentine-like thing winding slowly between them, the heavy vans in which the circus travelled trailing wearily along in the raw

GOOD-BYE TO THE OLD LIFE

winter's morning, while church bells were ringing for the early service from the little village churches far and near. A great lump came into Fenella's throat as she pulled her mare up with a fearless hand about her soft nose, just inside the low hedge. She was *not* too late.

Nearer and nearer they came, those great clumsy vans, with yawning, sleepy men and untidy women crouched among the properties. But Fenella spoke to no one until a dull growling roar made her mount prick its soft ears and try to jib away from the hedge. Fen recognized that sound; it was Roy objecting to the journey.

She leaned forward and spoke very loudly, "Daddy! Daddy!"

Her father was sitting in the front of the huge van beside the driver. The collar of his shabby rubbed old coat was turned up to his ears; his hat was pulled down over his eyes. A pipe was held between his teeth, but he did not seem to be smoking, by which Fen guessed him to be much disturbed in mind. He looked neither to right nor left, but straight before. Would he see her, and would he hear her above the noise that Roy was making?

Holding the fretting mare in with consider-

FEN'S FIRST TERM

able difficulty, Fen called again, "Daddy! Daddy!" with all her heart in her voice.

The van was right abreast of her; the mare danced wildly, so that it was all that even Fen could do to keep her seat. Would daddy go by without even looking at her?

"DADDY!"

Andrew Ferne turned his head and took his pipe out of his mouth. Then he stood up and waved his hat, a sudden smile lighting up his sad face. He did not speak, perhaps because Roy was making so much noise that it would have been difficult to make himself heard unless he shouted as Fen had done, but he had seen her. Then Nimrod, getting tired of letting old Roy have it all his own way, gave vent to an ear-shattering roar.

Fen knew what the sound meant and was not startled, but the roan mare gave one wild leap into the air that all but unseated her rider, and then turned and flew like the wind in the direction of her own stable. Fen, gripping with hands and knees with all her might, had no chance of making any further farewells, and when at last she managed to calm the terrified horse to some extent, the road and the train of circus vans upon it were all out of sight. There

GOOD-BYE TO THE OLD LIFE

was a lump in her throat, but she did not cry. It was an understood thing in the circus world that Fenella never cried. "Well, anyhow, three months isn't so very long," she told herself, trying to pretend that she really thought so.

She walked the mare back to the stables, crossing the avenue just as two graceful figures in fur and velvet came round the bend in it, with prayer-books in their hands; her aunts - Frances and Rosalind returning from the early service. They looked at Fenella, in her shabby old clothes, astride upon the sweating, trembling mare. And Lord Roswell ran at the same moment from the stables. They all gazed at Fenella, and she knew suddenly that she had done something dreadful.

CHAPTER IV

THE BEGINNING AT CLIFF DENE HOUSE

IT was Tuesday morning, the Tuesday following on that Sunday when Fen had committed the heinous offence of taking out her grandfather's mare without permission, bringing her back "all in a lather," and, to crown everything, doing it all on a Sunday morning before she was called.

Fen had not attempted to explain when caught in the very act by her horrified relations. Perhaps if Aunt Frances had been alone it might have been possible to say something; but Aunt Rosalind didn't like her—Fen was sure of that. Aunt Rosalind had a way of looking unutterable things, and as though she expected Angela to be contaminated—and she would never have understood that Fen just *had* to see daddy again. So Fen put up with Aunt Rosalind's horror, and the general scolding, in a proud silence, even though the conclusion of it all was that she was to be packed

THE BEGINNING AT CLIFF DENE HOUSE

off to school the moment that she had clothes which were fit to be seen.

The tone about the clothes hurt, because if her mack was very old her jumper was new, and it was the first she had ever had, and father had bought it for her himself the first time she had done the tableau with the lions and the Union Jack. Fen held her tongue in an offended silence, and wore one of Angela's dresses for church, a thing which she disliked intensely, and was quiet and good all day. She was too proud to remonstrate about school, though she did not like the idea at all ; but she had gathered that all her new relations, except perhaps Aunt Frances, who had tried for an extension of the time to be spent at home in getting used to things, were sure that she needed breaking in as soon as possible. So she bore it when on Monday her two aunts took her up to town for a long day of shopping, and set her up completely with everything that could be got for her ready-made, from top to toe, particularly toe. And Gunter had marked them all with neat little name tapes that evening ; and to-day Fenella was to be plunged into the new world of school.

“ But you will come home every Saturday

with Angela, you know, dear," Aunt Frances had said last night when she came to sit upon Fenella's bed; "and I am sure you will be happy at Cliff Dene House."

Fen had made a little grimace in the darkness. "I suppose I'll have to stick it, anyhow," she said. "Will all the girls be like Angela?"

Aunt Frances laughed. "School is a little world. You will find all sorts among the girls, I expect; but if you are really unhappy, you write to grandfather direct, and ask him whether he would allow you to be at home a little while and learn with Miss Harwood, as I intended. Grandfather is very kind, you know, and he never would wish you to be unhappy. But he thinks you will do better at school."

"Wonder whether he would, if I hadn't taken his mare out," Fen said shrewdly; but Aunt Frances gave no answer to that question. Perhaps she could not.

And so had come the morning and the plunge into the very new life of school.

Fen dressed herself in the new clothes. Well, at all events, it was a comfort to be wearing things that were her own, not Angela's. They were very nice clothes, too; all the Cliff

THE BEGINNING AT CLIFF DENE HOUSE

Dene girls wore for everyday, in winter, navy serge coats and skirts and white knitted jumpers, and navy velour hats with a blue-and-white ribbon. Fen put on her outdoor things when she got up, as she had been told to do. She was to start directly after an early breakfast, so that she might be in time for prayers at Cliff Dene. Aunt Frances was to take her to the school; it was a great relief that Angela had gone back yesterday! Fen supposed she would not see her grandfather again, but as she walked into the corridor his door opened and he came out.

“Oh, there you are, young woman!” Fen stood still. She wasn’t going to make advances after having been told on Sunday that she had not behaved straightforwardly in taking the mare.

“Come here!” ordered her grandfather, and Fenella went unwillingly. He laid his hand upon her shoulder. “You’re going among strangers; don’t let our name down,” he said.

Fen stiffened. “I shan’t let father’s name down. My name’s Ferne,” she said.

Her grandfather looked down at her with searching eyes, under heavy eyebrows. Fenella met his rather stern gaze squarely. Grandfather

FEN'S FIRST TERM

was rather a terrifying person, but no one had succeeded in frightening Fenella particularly up to date.

"Well, you are not lacking in impudence—or in spirit," he said slowly, adding the last three words almost grudgingly after a perceptible pause. He held out something black and white and crisp that crackled in his hand. "I suppose, like most boys and girls, you can do with a tip. Here you are."

Fenella put her hands behind her. "No, thanks."

"Why not?" demanded grandfather, rather sharply.

"You know," said Fen. "Good-bye, grandfather. Aunt Frances is calling me."

She ran down the great staircase, leaving Lord Roswell still standing in the gallery with the five-pound note in his hand.

Aunt Frances was kind over breakfast, but that she always was. Fen found it quite possible to take a ten-shilling note from her, and it went into the new russia-leather purse, smelling deliciously, which had been part of the school outfit.

The car was at the door before Lord Roswell came down to breakfast, and Fenella jumped

THE BEGINNING AT CLIFF DENE HOUSE

in and was whirled off to start yet another chapter of the new life.

She only asked a few questions on the way, "Does daddy know I'm going to school?"

"Not yet. I had intended Miss Harwood to teach you, and told him so," Aunt Frances said.

"Can I write?"

"Yes, but he doesn't want you to write often."

"Aunt Frances, I don't believe that. Daddy and I are pals."

"He has reasons, dear," Aunt Frances said gently. "But you can write and ask him."

"And I shall go on writing whatever he or anybody says," Fen exclaimed defiantly. "I suppose the idea is that I should forget him, but I shan't."

"No, dear, and I don't wish you to forget him for a moment," Aunt Frances told her gravely. "But I think you should do what he tells you."

"Well, anyway, Nevill's Circus will always find him," Fen flared. "And I'm *not* going to turn into a lady at this old school—if it means forgetting him."

FEN'S FIRST TERM

Aunt Frances said nothing, and Fen felt rather ashamed. She moved a little nearer to her aunt.

"But I should like to be the sort of lady you are, if I could," she mentioned in a whisper. "Only I *don't* want to be Aunt Rosalind's and Angela's kind."

They were at Cliff Dene House in a very few minutes after that, and Fen found herself following her aunt across a wide, pretty hall with deep-cushioned window-seats, and in at the door of a delightful drawing-room, where a tall, grey-haired lady, who wore pince-nez, was standing as though waiting for them.

She and Aunt Frances shook hands as old friends, and then Fen had her turn.

"So this is Fenella Ferne?" Miss Macdonald said, in her rather deep-toned voice. "Well, Fenella, you are quite new to school, but you have your cousin Angela to put you in the way of things."

"Strikes me she'll have a tough row to hoe," said Fenella, and saw that her aunt and Miss Macdonald exchanged a quick glance over her head.

! But nobody reproved her, only Miss Macdonald said: "The prayer bell has rung—we

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will go in. You will stay, won't you, Miss A'Court ? ”

“ Please. I always love prayers here,” Aunt Frances said, and she and Fen and Miss Macdonald all went to the school hall together, walking up a sort of lane between the lines of waiting girls.

There were sixty-two girls at Cliff Dene House that term—though, of course, Fen did not know that till afterwards. She just thought then that she had never seen so many girls all together, and all so aggressively tidy.

She sat in the front row beside Aunt Frances, and Miss Macdonald read prayers from a small platform, and a hymn was thumped out on the piano by a girl and sung lustily by all the others, and then prayers were over. The girls filed out. Aunt Frances put her arm round Fen.

“ Good-bye, dear child. Only till Saturday, and by then I am sure you will be able to tell me that you have made some friends and like Cliff Dene.”

Fenella shook hands. “ Good-bye, Aunt Frances. I shall be all right.”

Miss Macdonald saw Aunt Frances to the door, leaving Fen alone in the big empty room.

Fenella walked round it, looking at the

FEN'S FIRST TERM

photographs and other curiosities upon the walls, and the silver cups on the black marble mantelpiece. Cliff Dene seemed to have won these in sports—swimming, racing, tennis and such-like. The photos were of various teams; Fen was interested, but puzzled. She had not belonged to a world where games were played. On the whole, she decided, it was rather dull in the school hall, while Miss Macdonald was talking to Aunt Frances on the doorstep.

She scrambled up lightly to one of the high windows which stood open, letting in the keen air and the palely bright sunshine of a perfect January morning. Fenella knelt upon the window-seat and surveyed the view.

She could see the flight of steps up to the front door, and the car in which she had come waiting there for Aunt Frances to go back in it. She could see the neat, alert chauffeur standing by the open door, the fur rug over his arm, waiting until Aunt Frances had finished her talk with Miss Macdonald. But she could see something more interesting than that.

Almost immediately below her, driven from their proper place at the foot of the steps by the big car, stamped and fidgeted four riding horses, held by a little nervous-looking man

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mounted on a fifth. Some of the Cliff Dene girls were going for a ride. Fen looked enviously at the horses. She had not known that riding was one of the things you did at school.

The horses did not seem to like waiting, and perhaps they were fretted by the unusual place ; Fen saw that the little nervous man had as much as he could do to hold them. One, a beautiful little roan mare, had jibbed her head away, jerking the reins from his fingers. He caught them with his elbow, pressing them to his side ; but Fen saw that the mare could be off if she chose.

The temptation was irresistible. Fen crouched in the window for a moment, measuring her distance, and then dropped neatly and lightly upon the mare's back. She gave a great bound, as well she might, but Fen gripped, laughing aloud as she caught a glimpse of the horrified expression of the riding-master, and the amazed faces of the four girls who were coming down the steps, all looking very smart and up to date in the latest thing in riding habits. Angela was among them. Fen was just able to realize that, before the mare was past the car and out of the gate and on to the quiet country road as fast as she could tear.

FEN'S FIRST TERM

Fen sat tight and enjoyed herself absolutely and entirely for the first time since she had left the circus. It was like flying; no sense of wrong-doing was there to spoil her pleasure; she just sat still and was deliriously happy.

About half a mile on, the road forked; one side going down to the river, with its wide towing path, the other leading on towards the little town, where Cliff Dene girls shopped when they got the chance. Fen turned the head of the beautiful little mare towards the river. The river-side seemed to be the most open sort of place she could find; there wouldn't be people to worry, and she could let the mare drop into a walk, and lean over and stroke the satiny neck and make friends.

But as she gathered up the reins to slacken that headlong speed a child's shrill scream broke on her ear, and as she looked, startled, to the broad, smoothly flowing river, she saw something that made her catch her breath with a sense of sheer physical suffocation for a moment, before the knowledge of what she could do brought her nerve back.

She had struck the towing path not half a mile above the weir, and well below the place where red "Danger" placards upon either side

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of the river warned boats to go no farther. And yet there was a boat upon the river—a boat that was hurrying relentlessly on to certain death, for its one occupant, a little huddled heap, crouched in the bows and screaming wildly, evidently had no oars, even had she been big enough to use them.

Fen and her borrowed mare were just abreast of the boat. The child saw them, and held out her arms, giving vent to another imploring scream. The mare put back her ears at the sound. Fen had made up her mind in a minute, and, leaning over, spoke to the horse in the friendly way she had learned to talk to animals in Nevill's Circus.

“Look here, matey, we've got a tough job before us. You don't like to hear that poor little kid screaming for help? No more do I. We've got to get her out of that blessed boat, and double quick, too, or it will be over the weir. Come on, you dear thing—put all you know into it.”

They were galloping along the towing path at a pace compared to which the gallop from the school had been slow. The poor little terrified child in the boat shrieked despairingly and reproachfully as horse and rider passed

FEN'S FIRST TERM

her, but Fen could not look. She had seen that the one chance of saving the child was to get well ahead of the boat and then put the mare at the water in time to cross its bows.

The roar of the weir was growing louder; the mare did not like it—her ears were back—her eyes distressed. But Fen pushed her on determinedly. It was going to be a tight fit, anyhow, with the weir so close, and she must gain time for a possible fight with the mare's fear at taking the water. Now she was far enough ahead, and close, horribly close, to the weir. There was not a second to lose.

Very carefully and steadily she coaxed the mare's head round, and, pressing her knees into the saddle, urged her forward. The mare snorted violently; this wasn't behaviour she was used to in riding lessons with the school. But this small human thing upon her back was different from the other girls, who were always being told to sit straight, and to ride on the snaffle or the curb, or something which they didn't happen to be doing. The mare did not like the look of the river, but she listened to the steady voice that spoke to her as though it understood how uncomfortable a self-respecting horse was bound to feel.

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“That’s it—steady, my beauty. I know it’s cold, but I have your reins quite firmly. Steady—you’re all right. And you wouldn’t leave a baby to be drowned any more than I would. You know you wouldn’t, you darling brave thing. That’s right—come along—I’ve got you—swim!—we’ve all but done it.”

The boat was swinging down upon them, its pace rapidly increasing as it neared the weir. Keeping the scared horse well in hand, Fen put all her force into a shout that reached the poor terrified baby above the noise of the falling waters.

“Stand up!”

The boat rushed down upon the snorting, panting mare, the child in it half scrambling to her feet. Fen leaned down, and as the boat whirled past got her arm round the little shivering thing and dragged her up on to the saddle before her, with a wrench that seemed nearly to drag her arm from its socket. The boat rushed on, disappearing in a minute over the weir.

Fen, absorbed in turning the mare and impeded by the child, hardly noticed a burst of cheering from the towing path, and did not realize, until the mare was making thankfully

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for the river bank, that quite a crowd had assembled there by now, watching her.

There was the riding-master, looking as though he could say much worse things than "sit straight," and six or seven other men and two or three women, all staring at Fen and the little child and the mare, as though they had never seen a girl, or a horse, or a little child, in their lives before, Fen thought. She guided the mare neatly to the best landing place, and trotted up to the riding-master. It had just occurred to her that he might reasonably be annoyed with her for borrowing the horse.

"Sorry," she apologized; "'fraid you'll have to give the mare a rub down and a warm mash instead of taking her out. I can do it if you're busy—it wouldn't be the first time—but I must take this poor mite home first."

The riding-master took the mare's reins, looking her over with anxious eyes.

"I could no more take the young ladies out this morning after this than I could fly!" he said impressively. "You could have knocked me down with a feather when I saw you take that mare into the water, with a current fit to have an elephant over. . . ."

But if the riding-master was discouraging,

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the rest of the onlookers made up for it. They crowded round Fen and the trembling mare; everybody wanted to shake hands with her, and ask how she had dared. It was with difficulty that she could get a word in edge-ways to ask if anyone knew where the child lived.

“Looks like Colonel Templeton’s little granddaughter,” the riding-master said, peering at the child, who was still clinging to Fen, her face hidden. “He’s a gentleman that keeps himself to himself, but I think I’ve seen this little lady with him; though what she was doing in that boat by herself——”

“I got in,” said the child in a small, clear voice. “It was in the boat-house, and Nanny has a sore throat in bed, so I was bored and I undid the wope like grandfather did, to go for a sail, and the boat wouldn’t stop.”

She shivered and hid her face again. Fen thought the moral about not touching boats without leave had been quite rubbed in enough by the terrible fright. Besides, she was beginning to be conscious that her feet were soaked and that she was very cold, and also that it might be expected of her to go back to school and do some lessons.

"If you'll show me where you live, I'll take you home," she said cheerfully to the child, and trotted the mare gently out of the throng of eager, questioning people and down the towing path in the direction where the child pointed.

On the way she discovered that the child's name was Hazel Windermere; that her mother was dead and she lived with grandfather, and was six and a little bit.

"My mother's dead, and I've come to live with my grandfather, too," Fenella told her. "And my name is Fenella, and I'm fourteen and a little bit, so now we know all about each other, and here is your drive gate, isn't it? Slip down—there, steady, I've got you; and don't ever do things without asking leave again, will you, there's a darling?"

The little thing hugged Fenella before she slipped to the ground. "I won't ever again, Fenella, and I'll go and tell grandfather I've lost his boat and I'm sorry."

"I would," Fen advised, and turned her horse, heading back to the school.

When she had gone a little way she laughed. She had just remembered that there was something rather funny in her advice to little Hazel,

THE BEGINNING AT CLIFF DENE HOUSE

considering that doing something without asking any leave was exactly what she herself was engaged in.

“ I suppose I’ll be in for a row,” she thought as she trotted soberly in at the Cliff Dene gates, the riding-master, who seemed to feel responsible, riding three or four paces behind her.

CHAPTER V

FEN'S RECEPTION

ANGELA and the others were still standing outside with their horses. The whole incident of the rescue, which had seemed so endless, had really taken an extraordinarily short time.

Fen swung off the mare and jumped lightly to the ground. Her shoes squelched.

"Sorry, 'fraid I've hung up someone's ride," she said, not at all apologetically.

The girls in general received the remark in a stony silence. Only Angela spoke, and that in a very chilly manner.

"Miss Macdonald wishes you to go to her in her study directly you come back, Fenella."

Fen looked doubtfully at her shoes. "Oh, all right. Will someone show me where the what-d'you-call-it is?"

"I will," said Angela coldly.

If she had been a shade more friendly Fen would have told her what had happened, but

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she showed so unmistakably that her cousin had behaved disgracefully, and that it was only what she expected, that Fen felt she couldn't say a word. The two cousins, one immaculate and the other blown about and dishevelled and with shoes that squelched at every step, went across the hall and along a matted passage to Miss Macdonald's study in absolute silence.

Angela knocked. "Fenella has come back, Miss Macdonald, and I have brought her."

"Look here, do you think you're a policeman taking me in charge?" Fen burst out indignantly, but Miss Macdonald was already answering.

"Fenella, come in." And Angela gave her a little push, and she had to go. Well, Miss Macdonald couldn't be worse than the shiny-haired Mr. Nevill in a temper, anyway, she told herself.

Miss Macdonald was standing by the fire. She looked very tall.

"Where have you been, Fenella?"

"For a little ride," Fen answered squarely.

"On a horse that you borrowed without leave, spoiling the ride of four other girls," Miss Macdonald said. "Does that strike you as a particularly nice thing to do, Fenella?"

FEN'S FIRST TERM

Fen tried to be impartial. "Looked at in that way I suppose it wasn't, but——"

Miss Macdonald held up her hand for silence.

"I make all allowance for the fact that your upbringing has not been—usual——"

Fen interrupted in her turn, unaware of the heinous crime she was committing. "If you are going to say anything against my daddy, I warn you I won't stand it. I've had that from grandfather already. Daddy brought me up as well as anybody could——"

Miss Macdonald had probably never been so spoken to in the whole course of her school career.

"Hush, Fenella!" she ordered rather sternly. "You are quite mistaken in thinking that I intended any criticism of your father, but you are not speaking properly to me."

There was a little silence as Fen tried to make up her mind to the apology which she knew in her heart was due. Into the silence there came a curious sound—a sound that took Fen back in a flash to Nevill's Circus, and the warm, rank smell of the lions' cage, and the rows and rows of eager watching faces. For it was the sound of cheering that she heard.

FEN'S RECEPTION

Next moment there was a hurried knocking at the door.

"No one can come in: I am engaged," said Miss Macdonald.

But the knocker was not to be discouraged.

"*Please*, Miss Macdonald, just one minute, it's most tremendously important."

"Come in," conceded the Head Mistress, a little impatiently.

A girl burst in—a girl in a riding habit. Fenella had vaguely noticed her among the others with the horses, and had thought the freckled face and rather turn-up nose attractive.

"What is this tremendously important business, Wilhelmina?" asked Miss Macdonald, in a tone that could not be described as encouraging, to say the least of it.

"Miss Macdonald, I am ever so sorry to interrupt, but I *had* to come because of the new girl," Wilhelmina said. "I knew you would be—— I mean, of course, she is in a—in trouble about taking the horse, but old St—I mean Mr. Stubbs, has just been telling us. She's a heroine, and she's saved a life at risk of her own, and——"

Fenella woke up.

"Here, stop it!" she snapped out, but

FEN'S FIRST TERM

Miss Macdonald was looking thoroughly interested and not chilly any longer.

"What is this, Wilhelmina?" she asked.

Wilhelmina answered with a breathless and unpunctuated account of little Hazel's rescue, while Fen rather wished that the floor would open and swallow her. "Wasn't it splendid?" Wilhelmina concluded enthusiastically.

"Yes," agreed Miss Macdonald, and then she held out her hand to Fen.

"My dear, why did you say nothing?"

"There wasn't—I mean I'm used to horses," Fen stammered. Then—for Miss Macdonald's eyes were very kind—she blurted out: "I'm sorry I was rude just now. I didn't mean to be."

"Never mind—we shall understand each other better another time," the Head Mistress said. She laid her hand upon Fenella's shoulder. "Go and change your wet things. Wilhelmina will go with you and show you your room, and bring you back again to me. I must see Mr. Stubbs now."

She swept out in the direction of the hall.

Fen turned to the girl who had come to her rescue. "Is she mad about my taking the mare, Wilhelmina?"

FEN'S RECEPTION

Wilhelmina laughed. "Billy, please—no one calls me anything else. Mad—rather not! It isn't dear old Mack's way to gush—she's Scotch, you know—but she's as pleased as Punch, really. You've made some start as a Cliff Dene girl. Fancy that little ass Angela never telling us you were like this!"

The two were hurrying upstairs as Billy talked. Later on Fen came to know that all Miss Macdonald's orders had to be obeyed at once. Even Billy, though she certainly wanted to talk, only talked as she ran. Fen got in a word just then, chiefly because Billy was rather out of breath.

"Angela doesn't know much about me. We only met for the first time on Saturday night."

"*What*, and you're cousins!" shrieked Billy. "Had you a family feud or something?"

"No, but I was brought up in a circus," explained Fenella, rather proudly.

It had been borne in upon her during the three days since she had said good-bye to her old world that it was distinctly looked down upon in this new, odd, well-dressed one. She wasn't going to accept the friendship which Wilhelmina seemed so ready to offer if Wil-

FEN'S FIRST TERM

helmina, too, were going to despise daddy and his job. But Billy's comment was a heartfelt "Lucky brute!" and then a torrent of eager questions, which were not half answered when the two girls reached the pretty little blue-and-white bedroom, where Fen was to sleep with her Cousin Angela.

"She's not bad as a room-mate—I slept here last term," Billy mentioned. "She always gets you up in time, and reminds you to hang up your towels. But you mustn't let her pinch more than half the dressing-table—she's given that way. You had better have her skirt and shoes now; your things aren't unpacked."

"Think she'll mind?" Fen asked doubtfully, as the helpful Billy fetched out a dainty pair of shoes from their cupboard.

"Mind?" Billy spoke impressively. "There isn't a girl in the school who wouldn't be proud to lend you all the shoes she's got to-day."

She giggled. Billy was never serious for long, as Fen was to discover. "If you were a centipede you'd find out."

Duly guided back to Miss Macdonald's study, Fen found no Miss Macdonald, but an examination paper awaiting her with a note attached, written in a neat, clear hand.

FEN'S RECEPTION

“Do the best you can with this till break, Fenella.”

Billy, though rather agitated about her next class, showed the new girl how to write on one side only, and to leave a margin, and to write her name at the top of the paper, and number her questions, and begin each new subject on a new page. Then she fled, and Fen was left to face that absolutely unknown experience—an examination paper.

She took the English first.

“*What have you read in English Literature?*”

What *was* literature? Fen considered, with her head held in her hands, for two whole minutes; then she decided that it must be anything you had read in English. Her list was conscientious:

“The Wide Wide World.”

“The Pilgrim’s Progress.”

“Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea.”

“Station X.”

“Little Women.”

“The Dove in the Eagle’s Nest.”

“A Tale of Two Cities.”

When Angela came to fetch her cousin at eleven o’clock she found the table strewn with

FEN'S FIRST TERM

untidy beginnings of answers, and Fenella hot, inky and agitated.

"How did you get on?" Angela inquired patronizingly. "Oh, my dear!"

She had seen the French.

"Leave my papers alone, please," Fen said passionately. "They're nothing to do with you."

"There's nothing to lose your temper about," Angela told her. "I was only going to put them together for you in the way Miss Macdonald will expect them to be put. Of course you don't know."

She led the way to a dining-room full of long tables. On one of these glasses of milk and plates of biscuits were set out, and girls were standing about near it, helping themselves, or in little groups and knots, talking and laughing together. But all the noise and laughter stopped as if by magic as Fen, still sore and smarting from the contempt in her new cousin's voice, followed her into the room. There was a moment of absolute silence, and then Billy's voice raised in stentorian accents:

"Three cheers for Fenella Ferne!"

They cheered wildly; Fen would never have believed that only sixty girls could make such

FEN'S RECEPTION

a stirring noise. They didn't stop till a mistress looked in and said : " Now, girls ! "

Then about a dozen people charged hospitably at the new girl with biscuits and milk, and all the rest bombarded her with eager, admiring questions. No one asked how she had done her paper. They did not seem to care about that.

CHAPTER VI

WAR

FENELLA was not placed in Angela's form. That was at least a comfort. It would have been an even greater comfort if she hadn't been placed in Angela's bedroom.

The full horror of that position did not dawn upon Fen until after prep., when the girls came up to change for supper. Putting on coats, hats and boots for a rather dull school walk, in what Fen found was called a *croc*, had been a rapid affair, and Angela had not time to say anything objectionable, except reminding Fen to put on gloves ; changing for the evening was another matter.

Fen came up a little late, for Billy had insisted on introducing her to two friends—Pat Dysart and Daphne Rhone—both cheery-looking people who seemed inclined to be friendly. Angela was in her white lacy petticoat before Fen burst into the room, conscious that she had only left herself a short eight minutes in which

to perform that unaccustomed function—dressing for the evening.

“Why didn’t you come up when I did?” Angela inquired reprovingly.

Fen wanted to say, “Because I was talking to somebody nicer,” but thought it would be too rude. So she just whistled as she pulled off her outer clothes with reckless haste and cast them all anyhow on the bed.

“You will have to put everything tidily away before you go down,” Angela reminded her.

“Oh, all right!”

Fen’s shoes spun across the room.

“It would save time if you did it now.”

“‘Um!’” grunted Fen, wrestling with a frock that was fastened at the back with horrible little loops instead of proper buttonholes, and not too many of them, as a frock should be.

“I said it would save time if you did it now,” Angela repeated, in a painstaking way that was horribly aggravating.

“I heard all right the first time, thanks; you needn’t have bothered to say it twice,” Fen said, and that seemed to annoy Angela.

“Do you suppose I want everybody here to know that a relation of mine hasn’t got any manners?” she asked scornfully.

“ Think they'd expect 'em from a relation of yours ? ” inquired Fen with dangerous politeness, and of course that finished everything.

Angela just turned her back and changed her shoes and stockings in absolute silence. She did not even make a comment when Fen thrust dainty bronze evening shoes over her day-time thick ribbed black stockings, brushed her mop of bobbed hair in two bangs, and left half the back of her frock gaping, and the clothes she had discarded all over the room. The two went down together at the gong, still in unbroken silence.

However, that didn't matter, Fen found, when she got downstairs. Everyone else seemed to have plenty to say to her, and at supper she sat between Billy and Daphne, and was tolerably happy in spite of the strangeness of everything.

But just as strawberry jam tartlets were being handed round, somebody in neat nurse's uniform appeared in the dining-room, and spoke to the mistress who was taking supper ; she appeared to be called Miss Osric.

Miss Osric looked down the tables rather sternly. “ Who sleeps in number six ? Angela A'Court, it is you, isn't it ? ”

“ Yes, Miss Osric,” Angela answered.

“ Matron reports your room as being left in a disgracefully untidy condition.”

Fenella jumped up. “ I say, that wasn’t Angela—that was me.”

“ That isn’t the way to speak. Oh, you are the new girl ? Didn’t you tell her about leaving the room tidy, Angela ? ”

“ Oh, she told me—heaps.”

Fen still did the answering for Angela.

Miss Osric tried to look stern, and didn’t altogether succeed.

“ Fenella, to say ‘ she told me ’ would be quite enough, thank you, without the ‘ heaps.’ And girls here say ‘ Miss Osric ’ when they speak to me, though of course no one expects new girls to know everything. Another time attend to what your room-mate says ; she knows the rules here. And, in the meanwhile, go upstairs directly supper is over and put your room tidy. Next time matron reports you for untidiness it will mean an order mark.”

“ A how much—Miss Osric ? ”

All the girls were listening with great interest to the display of the new girl’s extraordinary ignorance in the ways of school. Miss Osric shook her head.

“Don’t ask me to explain, Fenella. I am sure that Angela—or—one of the others will put you in the way of things. Have you all finished? Stand for grace.”

The girls were trooping into the school hall for dancing. Billy grabbed Fen’s arm.

“Hurry up with that silly old tidying. I would come and help you, only it’s never allowed. Why couldn’t Angela have lent a hand on your first day?”

Fen didn’t like Angela, but you must stand up for your relations, she supposed.

“Oh, she did her best—I was late, you know,” she remarked, and fled upstairs.

Miss Osric’s reproof had been so good-temperedly given that she didn’t want to incur another just then.

She found her room without much difficulty, switched on the light, and began to put her things away. It didn’t take so very long, but she couldn’t get away from the thought of Angela and her good advice while she was doing it, and probably that was the reason that though she only spent five minutes in putting away her clothes, she spent another five in making for Angela a very complete and careful apple-pie bed.

When she had done that she brushed her hair properly and went downstairs to the school hall where the girls were dancing.

Billy saw her standing in the doorway, and deserting her partner Daphne, rushed at her.

"Have this with me, Fenella. Daphne won't mind."

"Thanks, but I don't dance," Fen explained.

"What? Don't you like it?"

"Never learned."

"How funny! I mean, of course, perhaps you didn't care about it," Billy corrected herself.

Angela interposed. "Fenella has only just come to live with my grandfather. Her people didn't bother to have her taught."

"He's my grandfather quite as much as he's yours," Fen flared; "and it wasn't that my father didn't bother about the dancing. Just he hadn't a chance. We were always on the rocks more or less. Mr. Nevill isn't over generous in the salary line."

The dance had stopped, and quite a little crowd had gathered round the astonishing new girl to hear what she had to say.

"Who was Mr. Nevill?" asked Pat. "And why was he stingy?"

"Mr. Nevill? Oh, he's boss of Nevill's Circus. I told you I was brought up in a circus. Daddy and I were in the lion-taming business there," Fen told them, easily, and could not think why Angela turned her back and walked away, getting as far off as she could from the eager buzz of questions round her cousin. But she couldn't escape Pat's penetrating voice.

"You were a lion-tamer? How topping! Do tell us everything."

Angela found Miss Osric, and asked if she might go to bed as she had a headache.

Miss Osric, who was good-naturedly playing for the girls, looked at her critically.

"You don't look as though much was the matter, and considering you share your room with your cousin. . . . Well, if you really aren't feeling well of course you can go, though I should have been inclined to—— It would be a little kinder to stay up the first night, wouldn't it, and put Fenella in the way of things? However, I don't want to victimize you. Go if you like, but look in at matron's room on your way up and report the headache."

Miss Osric, too, was prepared to make a silly fuss about Fenella. Angela hadn't thought it of Miss Osric. She went upstairs, feeling tho-

roughly annoyed with the world in general, and Fenella in particular; reported to matron as desired, had a thermometer thrust into her mouth, and a small dose of something most unpleasant-tasting administered there and then, after which she was told there was nothing the matter with her, but she was to hurry into bed and not go dawdling about catching cold. Angela hurried, and didn't discover the apple-pie bed till the light was out and she was in it. At least as far in as the ingeniously twisted sheets and blankets would allow, while she found that she shared the bed with a hair-brush, a clothes-brush and a large poker.

Anyone might have been annoyed, but Angela was more than annoyed; she was furious. So that was how Fenella had paid her out for her attempts to help her with advice! Angela wasn't going to remake her bed and restore poker, hair-brush and clothes-brush to their proper places. Fenella should do that when she came up. In the meantime Angela sat, aggressively cold, on the outside of her unsleepable bed, to wait till bedtime proper. It seemed a long time, but there was a certain satisfaction even in getting so horribly chilly; she would certainly have a bad cold to-morrow, and

Fenella would know how disgracefully she had behaved.

Miss Osric came up with Fenella. That was rather disconcerting. Angela did not particularly want to see anyone till next morning, when the cold would have been indisputably there.

Miss Osric was talking. "Then I shall expect you in my room at—— Why, Angela, not in bed—how is that? How extremely silly on this bitter night."

"I couldn't help it," Angela said, shivering.

"Couldn't help—— I am ashamed of you. Get into bed at once," Miss Osric said severely. And Angela, with the air of a martyr, turned back the bed as far as it would go, which wasn't far. It was far enough to show the knob of the poker, though.

Fenella had quite forgotten the apple-pie bed until then; she was so much interested in what Miss Osric was telling her about the special lessons they were to do together in Miss Osric's own room, special lessons that in a little while would make it quite easy for her to take her place among the other girls.

Now, of course, she remembered what she had done, and giggled. If Angela had not been so desperately injured, Fen would have apologized

for keeping her out of bed when she had a headache. As it was, no one could be expected to apologize to that face.

Miss Osric put her hand into the bed and pulled out first the poker and then the brushes. "Your work, I suppose, Fenella?"

"Yes, Miss Osric."

"Very silly and rather unkind," pronounced Miss Osric firmly, though not as severely as Angela expected or hoped. "Make the bed properly, Fenella, and be quick about it, and don't do that sort of thing again. It isn't funny."

Fenella, rather crushed, pulled off the twisted bedding, and sorted it with all possible speed, while Angela shivered terrifically. Miss Osric bore the shivers for a whole minute; then observed caustically:

"You might almost have remade your bed yourself, don't you think, instead of waiting forty minutes for Fenella?"

Angela had no answer ready, but she still wore the expression of a martyr, and Fen wouldn't apologize while that look was to the fore.

Miss Osric saw Angela into bed, told Fenella to hurry, and said "good night" to both girls. There was silence in the blue-and-white room when she had gone.

CHAPTER VII

NEXT MORNING

ANGELA sneezed violently three times when getting up next morning. She also coughed a good deal. Perhaps she couldn't help the sneezing, but Fenella was pretty sure she might have coughed less if she had chosen. Fen took no notice, in a rather aggressive manner.

It was a bright sunny morning, though cold. Fen was ready a good five minutes before the gong was due to sound, and opened the window wide to lean out and discover how much one could see of the river from the upper windows of Cliff Dene House. Angela addressed her for the first time since last night, and with an exasperating patience.

"Do you mind shutting the window, Fenella, please? I have a cold."

Fen certainly banged it, but not so loudly that Angela required both hands to her head and such a realistic wince.

"And would you try and be a little quieter, too? My head aches dreadfully."

NEXT MORNING

“ Can’t you think of something else to have the matter, while you’re about it ? ” suggested Fenella, which certainly could not be described as a conciliatory remark. They went downstairs, in a silence which had been resumed by mutual consent.

Angela ate hardly any breakfast, and answered sympathetic inquiries in a very “ ill ” voice. She certainly had a slight cold, but Fen felt tolerably sure it wasn’t as bad as she made out. She was beginning to despise as well as to dislike her Cousin Angela.

There was a summons to Miss Macdonald’s room for Fen directly breakfast was over. She went rather defiantly ; she had got off yesterday, but to-day, of course, she was going to be scolded and probably punished about that silly old apple-pie bed. Well, she didn’t care, Fen told herself defiantly.

But Miss Macdonald, sitting at her big writing-table surrounded by papers, did not appear to have anything to say about that apple-pie bed. At all events, she did not begin upon the subject.

“ Ah, Fenella, sit down. Miss Osric told you, I dare say, that she and I had been through your papers together ? ”

"Yes."

" 'Yes, Miss Macdonald,' Fenella. Now, of course, your education has naturally been irregular, and that means that at first you are at a disadvantage among girls who were taught in a more usual way. But you will find that special coaching makes a great deal of difference, and you must not allow yourself to be disheartened if you find yourself below the standard of the Third Form, where I propose to place you."

"Miss Osric said I shouldn't be with Angela?" Fen interrupted anxiously.

"Angela is in the Fourth."

"That's all right," Fen said heartily.

Miss Macdonald smiled a little oddly. "Is it, I wonder? You find Angela very trying, I suppose?"

"Oh, I don't know," Fen said, growing red.

"You don't know? I am glad to hear you say that. Because, you know, there are two sides to people as well as to most questions. You don't find Angela very easy to get on with—I can understand that—and I am sorry for you, Fenella. But I am much more sorry for her."

Fen stared for a whole minute in silence into Miss Macdonald's keen, plain, clever face, and

good grey eyes. Then she acknowledged slowly :
“ I suppose it was a bit mean of me to make her the apple-pie bed.”

Her eyes twinkled unrepentantly at the recollection. “ But I *did* enjoy doing it ; you see I’ve never had the chance to make an apple-pie bed for anyone before.”

“ And you felt that a good and sufficient reason for doing it last night, Fenella ? ”

“ Not exactly. Well, I guess I oughtn’t to have done it.”

“ It was perhaps rather feeble to take revenge for what Angela had said, and for the doubtless unpleasing fact that she happened to be quite right,” Miss Macdonald suggested. “ But we will not go back to all that, my dear. As a matter of fact I meant a good deal more than the perpetrating of a rather childish trick on your part, when I told you that I was sorry for Angela. You can put the silly affair of the apple-pie bed quite straight with an apology, I hope ; the other matter will need a good deal more in the way of effort. But if you can make yourself see the hardships of Angela’s position, I think you will decide that it is quite worth while to try.”

Fen stared with all her eyes ; it had never

struck her that the prosperous, superior Angela required sympathy. Still, Miss Macdonald was certainly in earnest.

"Because she has to show up a cousin like me, who's all wrong?" she asked bluntly. "I didn't *want* to be her relation."

Miss Macdonald smiled at that. "I think I had gathered that neither of you felt—shall we say enthusiastic?—over the relationship. But, you see, that has been arranged for you; what is left for you and Angela, both, is to make the best of it."

"I'm not going to pretend I was brought up like a lady just to please Angela," Fen declared. "I'm not ashamed of—of anything."

"Silly child, who asked you to be? The girls here least of all," Miss Macdonald smiled. "Don't you see that it is just because you are by no manner of means what you describe as 'all wrong' in the eyes of the other girls that the situation is so much harder for Angela."

"I don't see." Fen was puzzled.

"You don't? I think in Angela's place I might have found it easier to carry out the resolutions which she probably made of being very kind to you, if you had seemed to need help and advice, instead of showing yourself in

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the light of a heroine to the other girls by saving . . .”

“That wasn’t anything,” Fen interrupted crossly. “I can’t help it if they make a silly fuss.”

“No, my dear, you cannot help it, and I am glad you should feel that the fuss is silly. But what you can help is making it all harder for Angela. You and she are standing on opposite banks at present, and I think the building of the bridge across will have to come from both sides. But don’t you feel as though you might begin? You have made such a good start among us, Fenella, that you can very well afford to be generous. Do you see what I mean? Will you try?”

“I’ll try, Miss Macdonald,” Fen said.

She went in search of Angela at once, and ran her to earth in the school hall, nursing her cold by one of the big fires, with an ostentatious display of handkerchiefs. Fenella tried not to notice that; she still was not quite clear what Miss Macdonald meant, but she did understand the appeal to be generous. Daddy had always hated shabbiness in thought, word or deed.

“Look here, Angela, I’m sure it must be

horrid for you having a relation like me ; but I'm sorry about last night, and I'll not rag you again, and I'll do my best not to disgrace you," she blurted out. " And if you could put me in the way of things, a *little* at a time, I'd probably manage to be grateful. And won't you shake hands and make it up ? "

Angela gave her hand, limply and with a very faint and watery sort of smile. It certainly could not be described as an ardent reconciliation on her part ; but Fenella thought that perhaps the apple-pie bed was still rather fresh. She wouldn't notice the limpness, but it must be confessed that she got away from Angela as soon as she could manage, without being rude. The fact that girls had to take their places for prayers almost at once made it much easier. Fen sat beside Billy, and Billy was never limp. Besides, Miss Macdonald had an announcement which was so exciting that it put every sort of grievance out of everybody's head, for the time being, anyway.

" Our usual dancing and gymnastic display is fixed for the twenty-seventh of April, exactly three months from to-day," Miss Macdonald said, " and in connexion with it I have a very pleasant announcement to make to you

NEXT MORNING

girls. In addition to the usual dancing prizes for the Senior and Junior Classes our kind neighbour, Colonel Templeton, has written offering us a splendid gymnastic prize to be competed for in two divisions, under and over fourteen. This most generous offer is made, he asks me to tell you all, in gratitude to the school from which came the rescuer of his little granddaughter. I think, girls, that we should all wish to give Colonel Templeton three of our best cheers."

Cliff Dene House School obviously did wish. The cheers came with tremendous vigour and heartiness, and then someone started a supplementary cheer for "Fenella Ferne," and it was taken up with even greater heartiness and vigour. Fen was a great person at school that morning, and all because, as she put it to herself, she was used to horses. In a vague sort of way she began to see what Miss Macdonald had meant in thinking that circumstances were a little hard upon Angela. Fen decided that she would have to try to be nice, really nice, to Angela to make up—only how in the world was she to start? Put her shoes together, and her brush and comb away? Those were such little things. Find something in which Angela

could beat her, something that counted—not just lessons—and give her the chance of showing her superiority? Fen thought that might be the beginning of the bridge-building of which Miss Macdonald had spoken so earnestly, and watched for an opportunity of finding the thing in which Angela could beat her. And in the meantime she bore with Angela's advice, and put her shoes together.

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE GYM

TWO days had gone by, two days packed with new experiences for Fenella, but experiences which were by no means unpleasant on the whole. She had learned the use of a serviette, and the disuse of the expression "Right-o," in reply to mistresses; she had discovered that silk stockings go with evening shoes, and that Scott was an author and not merely an exclamation with "Great" attached.

She had been to tea with little Hazel Windermere, and had discovered that Colonel Templeton had been what he described as "the dug-out" who commanded the battalion into which daddy had been first drafted, and had found him very friendly and not frightening at all. She had been introduced to netball, and although its rules were puzzling, for she had never played anything except draughts and halma, she found it distinctly exhilarating. And she had found a great many points in common with Billy, in spite of the different upbringing. But somehow

she did not seem to have come any nearer to Angela. And then there came the morning when Miss Macdonald made the announcement for which it seemed that all the school had been waiting anxiously ever since they had been told of Colonel Templeton's prize.

It was after prayers on the fourth morning of Fen's stay at school ; Fen always remembered that morning afterwards, because it was the beginning of so much. And yet she had no idea that it was anything special in the way of a morning, as she stood among the girls of her form, listening while Miss Macdonald explained very clearly and carefully what the gymnast competitors would have to do, and on what terms they might do it. Rope-climbing, with a trumpet to be blown on top, bar-balance, vaulting with the " horse," etc., etc. Fen listened at first with interest, and then with some inward amusement. Miss Macdonald was making so much of it all ; there was to be no practising for any of the tests unless the gym mistress was present ; no new girl was to try anything until she had been sounded by the school doctor ; new girls to go very carefully and quietly to work and not to enter for the competition classes unless they had done gym before, and so on.

IN THE GYM

Fen thought the elaborate rules distinctly funny ; she supposed the standard must be very high, or that Miss Macdonald had not mentioned half what would be required. Snaky Jim and Big Ben, the "Acrobatic Wonders" of the Circus, had taught her to do everything that Miss Macdonald had mentioned for the Special Competition Class, and a great deal more besides.

In break the girls could talk of nothing else. Who would be passed for the Competition Class ? Who stood the best chance in either division ? Opinions were of course divided, but Fen heard Angela's name so often mentioned that it was evident she was considered a star gymnast. Her good resolutions of two days ago returned in force ; here was perhaps the chance of being really nice to Angela and beginning to build that bridge.

There had been no gym since Fen arrived, as some fresh apparatus was being put up, and there had only been physical drill, which Fen thought "slow," in the school hall. But report said that there would be Badminton after tea in the gym, so clearly it was in use again. Fen ate a biscuit hastily, and made her way across to Angela. "Is the gym open ?"

"I believe so."

"Can I go in?"

"I suppose you can if you like." Angela could not be described as encouraging.

"I suppose you wouldn't show me what you do here? You're a nut at gym, aren't you?"

"There isn't much time, and I want to look up some dates for my history-class," Angela explained grudgingly. "Still, I'll just show you over, if you like."

Fen wasn't exactly keen on bridge-building by this time, but she supposed she must try to put up with Angela's manner, irritating though it was. The two girls walked across the garden to the big army hut, which Miss Macdonald had acquired for a gymnasium. It had been fitted up in first-class style; nearly everything used was quite new to Fenella, and she was so eager and admiring that Angela began to thaw a little, and she opened out agreeably, if condescendingly, upon the uses of the various apparatus. "I suppose you haven't done any gym at all, Fenella?" she asked.

Fen considered. What she had done with Snaky Jim and Big Ben was not gym, she was sure.

"No, I haven't," she said.

Angela became still more pleasant. "You'll

IN THE GYM

have to take the easy exercises all this term then, I'm afraid."

"I suppose so. And you'll be A1 Top-Dog, Competition Class. You're really good at it, I guess."

"Don't say 'I guess,' please, Fenella; Miss Macdonald wouldn't like it."

"Right-o! But you are!"

"Well, I got the medal last year," Angela mentioned modestly.

"And I suppose you'll get Colonel Templeton's prize this time; I hope you will," Fen said heartily. "If you beat all the crowd last year I suppose you are safe this—unless there are any dark horses among the new girls."

"Really, Fenella, your expressions! And I don't suppose new girls will be competing. No one has done much gym before, I know. What we have to do would be too difficult for new girls."

"What sort of things?" Fen was really interested now, and pleased to find that she and Angela were talking easily. "Do tell me what you'll take, Angela. I'm very keen really. About the different things, I mean—not the kindergarten hanky-panky Miss Macdonald was talking about."

Angela froze again. "Really, Fenella!"

"What's wrong with my language this time?" Fen asked resignedly. "Sorry, if I didn't put it right. What do you do, besides those feeble little stunts?"

"Feeble little stunts? Do you mean the competition entries?"

"*What!*" shouted Fen. "You don't mean to tell me that they're *all* the competition class goes in for?"

"You think they're easy because you don't know anything about them," Angela said angrily.

"Don't I? I'll show you. What do you call the difficult ones?"

"That balance on the bar, with the bar at ten feet—and a curtsy in the middle—only four of the class could do it at all last year. There may be six this time, but they're not at all sure," Angela informed her.

Fen measured the bar with a practised eye.

"It's only about eight feet up now."

"We were practising at that before they shut the gym."

"Thought you said you did ten feet?"

"Of course I do—it makes a good many girls nervous, though."

IN THE GYM

Fen walked towards the bar. "It's only to shift its holes—let's put it at the ten."

"We're not allowed to play about with the apparatus," Angela said, but dubiously.

"All right, if you funk. Let's see you walk it at eight," Fen said, a little contemptuously, forgetting her resolutions about Angela.

"I don't think I'd better. There'll be competition gym to-morrow, though I don't suppose that the lower classes will be allowed in to watch," Angela said.

"Well, show me what you competition girls can do now, if you don't funk."

Angela got upon the bar, a scarlet flush upon either cheek. She started at one end and walked half-way along it, balancing herself with her outspread arms. Half-way she curtsied gracefully, and then went on, arriving at the end with what Fen felt to be an expression of unutterable swank. She jumped down lightly to the floor.

"That is one of the things the competition class do."

"I see," Fen remarked. "Just help me with the bar, will you? I want to put it up a bit."

"Fenella, you mustn't. What are you going to do?" Angela demanded, in genuine alarm.

"Oh—walk along it."

"It's not allowed."

Fen laughed. "Then why did you? Never mind, though. Eight feet will do."

She jumped at the bar and caught it with both hands, swinging herself up easily enough. Next moment she was on her feet, balancing with graceful ease, and laughing aloud.

"Fenella, come down!" Angela shrieked. "You're breaking rules."

But Fen went on.

Balancing with perfect ease she almost ran along the bar, performed a spring half-way, where Angela had curtsied, came to the end and returned, ignoring Angela's demand that she should come down, and pausing half-way to pirouette on the return journey.

"Oh, do stop—you'll fall—and it's not allowed. Miss Macdonald doesn't allow it," Angela implored, as Fen poised herself for a second edition of this last performance.

"Yes, jump down, Fenella," ordered a quiet voice, and Fen became conscious that Miss Macdonald was standing in the open doorway of the gym, and was looking at her.

Fenella came off the bar, neatly and rapidly. On the whole she would have preferred that Miss Macdonald had not caught her, for Miss



"'Fenella come down!'" Angela shrieked. "You're breaking rules."
But Fen went on."

IN THE GYM

Macdonald had been decidedly "decent" since she came.

"Come here," said Miss Macdonald, and Fen went and stood in front of the Head Mistress like a culprit.

Angela followed her, a little way off.

"Why were you on that bar?"

Fen hesitated for a moment. It wasn't that she was afraid, but the exact truth was, "Because Angela did it first, and did it swankily." One couldn't very well say that, though, of course, Angela would be certain to confess to having been upon the bar in another moment. What she did say was:

"I'm quite safe on bars."

"That is not the question. I heard Angela telling you that what you were doing was absolutely against rules, and you went on doing it."

"Sorry," murmured Fen, wondering why on earth Angela was so long in speaking. After all, she had begun the disobedience, although Fen it was who had asked her what the competition class did.

"I reminded all you girls only this morning that no one was to do any practice in the gymnasium unless our gym instructor was present,

and you go practically straight from listening to me to performing a dangerous exercise, in spite of the efforts of your cousin Angela to stop your disobedience. Go to your room, Fenella, and remain there for the present."

Fen turned right round and looked at Angela. But Angela was still dumb. Fenella went upstairs.

CHAPTER IX

PROCEEDINGS OF AN ESCAPED PRISONER

FEN paced up and down the little room, rather like the caged wild animals among which so much of her early life had been passed. She was raging at the injustice ; Angela had walked the bar as much as she had. Angela not only had not owned up, but had taken the credit of doing her best to stop her cousin's disobedience.

"Catch me trying to be nice to her again, the little cat !" Fen said furiously to herself. "I'm glad and thankful I made her an apple-pie bed."

It was very dull in the little bedroom, pretty though it was. Girls might not keep story books there, reading in bed being absolutely taboo, by Miss Macdonald's wise decree. There was nothing to be done, and for all Fen knew she might be imprisoned up here all day.

The injustice rankled, more particularly because she had been really trying to be nice to Angela ; at least, to begin with. Fen suddenly

decided that she would not bear it. She would get out.

She went to the door and opened it. No, she had not been locked in, but, all the same, it would simply court discovery to go down passages and stairs and through the hall to the free outside world. And discovery would mean being sent back ignominiously to the unjust imprisonment. Fenella decided to try the window.

It was ajar ; she opened it wide. There was thick ivy and a water-pipe ; it was all ridiculously simple. Fen put on her outdoor things with the exception of gloves, which she forgot—she had not arrived at thinking them important—and slithered down two stories to the ground with the greatest ease. The bedroom looked out on the back of the house. She dived across a path-way and a tennis lawn, and through a garden gate into a shrubbery ; then dropped over a wall into the road.

It was a quiet country road, with nobody in sight. Fen shot down it at her best pace, and took the first turning away from the school.

It was a bright, sunny morning, but Fen was too indignant to enjoy herself. She probably would not have noticed it if it had been

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pouring "cats and dogs." Daddy would never have sent her to these new relations, she felt sure, if he had known how horribly mean Angela would be. And she would have to sleep with her, and have meals with her, and certainly share part of her play-time, and, worse still, spend every week-end with her, when she would be undiluted. And to-day was Friday—the week-end was appallingly near. Quite suddenly Fen thought that she would not bear it. It was *would*, not *could*. Fen had never said or thought in all her life that there was anything she could not bear. And as she thought that, the way of deliverance presented itself. The turning to the left had a sign-post, and on it was painted in distinct black letters: "Yield-hill $\frac{1}{4}$ mile. Cobberley 2 miles." And below again, a pointing hand, with "To the Station."

It was one of daddy's jobs to look out the trains for Mr. Nevill, and Fen had often helped when his head was bad. Mr. Nevill travelled luxuriously by train, while other people toiled along with the lumbering circus vans. Fen had helped her father this last time, which she had so little idea was to be the last. Mr. Nevill wanted a train that would land him at Sheringham for lunch, and they had found one which

FEN'S FIRST TERM

would meet that requirement, though it was very slow because it was Sunday, and stopped at almost every station *en route*, which was perhaps the reason why Mr. Nevill had not thought it worth while to thank them for their trouble. But Fen had noticed the names of the stations—Rooksboro', Maryfield, Yieldhill, Cobberley—they were all quaint, interesting-sounding names, she thought.

And here was one of the quaintest staring her in the face—Yieldhill—and only a quarter of a mile away. In that moment when she saw and recognized the name, the plan came up in Fen's mind, full grown. She had her purse in the pocket of her coat, and in it the ten-shilling note Aunt Frances had given her, still unspent. She would go to Sheringham and find daddy, and ask him to let her come back to the circus and the old life, away from Angela and injustice.

No sooner thought of than decided upon. Fen flew along the station road, in terror of being caught and stopped before the station was reached.

But fortune seemed inclined to favour her. She reached the station, and inquired breathlessly at the little booking office for the next train to Sheringham.

PROCEEDINGS OF AN ESCAPED PRISONER

“Coming in now, miss,” observed the book-ing-office clerk.

Fen threw down her note, and said : “Third single, please.”

“Return ? ” inquired the clerk.

“No ! ” Fen replied with emphasis. It wasn’t till then that she knew she had made up her mind that she wouldn’t come back to a school where Angela was a fixture.

She found an empty compartment. Not that it mattered much, for nobody here would know her, she was sure ; but she wanted time to arrange her thoughts. She would have to tell daddy what had happened, and explain to him how it was that she couldn’t stay, and it would need some explaining. Of course, she could say quite truthfully that Angela was mean and horrid ; but Aunt Frances was a dear—that must be owned in honesty.

Grandfather had talked as though her mother’s name was all that counted, and had packed her off to school as a punishment for riding his mare, but he had wished to tip her, and had certainly not been unkind.

And Billy and Daphne were topping, and the girls in general jolly and friendly ; and though Miss Macdonald had punished her for

walking the bar, it was disobedience. Fen knew that, and she had been "distinctly decent" over the affair of the first morning. Mr. Nevill would have had a great deal more to say—and he might not have stopped at speech—if Fen had ridden his horses without permission. Fen wasn't quite sure at the back of her mind how an absolutely honest statement of her causes for complaint would strike her father; but, anyhow, he would understand when she said that she couldn't be happy without him.

Not being a Sunday train this one did not stop at every station, and Sheringham was shouted by the porters within an hour. Fen jumped out on to the platform and looked about her. As she half expected, a flaring bill of Nevill's Circus showed up plainly on a hoarding just outside the station.

How familiar it all looked: the blue and scarlet lettering; the picture of herself dressed as she never was dressed—in sky blue and red—standing among half a dozen apparently maddened lions all ready to devour her; of *Made-moiselle Mignon* with quite a foot taken off her size; of *Signor Orlando*, riding seven horses—he never really attempted more than three, and that nervously.

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Fen gave up her ticket and walked out of the station, and went and stood in front of the hoarding with its flaring poster.

“NEVILL’S WORLD-FAMOUS CIRCUS.

“You will miss the chance of a lifetime if you fail to seize the opportunity of seeing this unique performance.

“Twice daily, 2.30 and 6.30.

“IMMENSE MENAGERIE.

“LIONS OF SAVAGE GRANDEUR.

“See the wonderful Child Lion-Tamer at play with three magnificent specimens of the King of Beasts.

“See the——”

“Some poster, ain’t it ? ” a boy’s voice said behind her. Fenella turned round. A boy, with a bucket of paste and two long brushes under his arm, with a roll of papers, had stopped to look as she was doing. “Thought when I was a-puttin’ of it hup that I’d like fine to get inside the circus.”

Fen turned round. He was a nice-looking boy, with a thin, freckled face and honest eyes.

"Can't you? Don't you leave off work in time?" Fen asked.

"Yuss—it ain't that, miss."

"What is it, then?" Fen asked.

"Nothink—jest I'm the man of the family since dad went, and we don't run to extr'y spechall luxuries these days, with grub and coal the price it is," the boy informed her cheerily.

"So long, miss."

"Stop a minute," Fen said eagerly. "I belong to the circus—at least, I did. If only I knew where Mr. Nevill is staying I could get you a pass. I'm sure I could."

The boy gave vent to a prolonged whistle.

"Pulling my leg, not 'arf, ain't you?"

"I'm not. If I could find Mr. Nevill——"

"The boss?"

"Yes, the boss. He might be in rooms or an hotel."

"If you could wait 'ere 'arf a mo I could nip round to our foreman—he went after that there Nevill to get paid for the bill-sticking," said the boy.

"All right, but don't be long," Fen said.

She stood still by the poster, thinking. She didn't look forward very much to seeing Mr. Nevill again, but he would be able to tell her

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where to find her father, and it wouldn't hurt her if he was still in a temper, though it might be unpleasant. And she felt rather sorry for this cheery boy who was the bread-winner at home. Fen knew what it was like to have the comfort of home depending on one's earnings.

The boy was back with incredible quickness.

"Martin's Commercial and Family, Lushington Road," he announced.

"Thanks awfully," Fen said. "Then—can you get off this afternoon?"

"Yuss, miss, me 'arf dye, thanks be."

"Right! Then come along to the circus—the door nearest the wild beasts' cage—and ask for Fenella Ferne. I'll see you have your pass, I promise."

"You're a real tip-top sport, you are," said the boy, and dashed on with his pail and his brushes to finish his job, with a broad, happy grin on his freckled face.

Fen went on her way to find Martin's Commercial and Family Hotel, and the boss.

CHAPTER X

FEN AND THE "BOSS"

PERHAPS it was because her eyes had been accustomed to something so different for the last few days that Martin's Commercial and Family Hotel struck Fenella so unfavourably.

After her grandfather's spacious and beautiful home—the home which would have been hers every week-end had she stayed—it struck her as narrow and cramped and sordid. After the freshness and openness of Cliff Dene House she couldn't help being conscious that it smelt of stale beer, spirits and tobacco, and general fug and unwashedness. The smell would have been quite natural a week ago—not pleasant, of course ; one could not expect it to be that—but nothing extraordinary. Now Fen found herself wrinkling up her nose and disliking it intensely.

However, it was no good being too fastidious ; she had deliberately turned her back on the life in which daddy had wished she should have

her chance, and come back to the old. If some things about it were not nice—well, there would be daddy to compensate for everything. And in another two or three minutes she would know where he was.

"Is Mr. Nevill in?" she asked of the slipshod hall porter, with down-at-heel old slippers instead of boots, who came to the door at her third ring.

"I don't know, miss."

"Will you see, please?"

The porter went to see, leaving her standing at the door, stared at curiously by a tousle-headed girl at the bar, and by a boy who was polishing glasses by breathing on them heavily and perseveringly. Fen found herself wondering what Aunt Frances would think of it all, or Miss Macdonald.

The porter came back. "He isn't in, but it's just 'is lunch time—ordered special, private room, on account of the show. You can wait 'ere, if you like."

"I'll wait in Mr. Nevill's sitting-room, I think," Fen said.

The bar was not inviting, and daddy had never allowed her to loiter about such places in the old days.

The porter looked doubtful. "I don't know as he'll be best pleased, miss."

"Oh, I know him very well," Fen said confidently. "I suppose he hasn't got Mr. Ferne with him by any chance—a gentleman with one arm?"

"Not staying 'ere; 'e was in yesterday and getting the rough side of our gent's tongue by the sound of it," the porter said. "This way, miss; but don't blame me if Mr. Nevill ain't exactly pleased to see you. He don't seem extra honey-sweet about the temper just now, and the circus only half full all the week so far, and some of them as went demanding their money back because the 'ighly advertised child lion-tamer ain't there."

While talking, the slipshod hall porter had brought Fenella into Mr. Nevill's private room, where preparations for a meal were already made on a dirty cloth, and cigarette ends on the floor and a chair drawn close to the unswept grate seemed to suggest that Mr. Nevill had not long been absent. The smeary windows, behind soiled net window curtains, seemed as though they never had been opened since Martin's Commercial and Family Hotel was first built.

FEN AND THE "BOSS"

Fen thanked the porter, and not troubling the chair which he had dusted for her, went and stood by the window, looking out. There was always a chance that father might go by; he would lunch a good deal earlier than Mr. Nevill, and go down to the circus to help in getting everything ready for the show. Of course, his work was specially in the lions' cage. That had to be clean and tidy, and the lions fed and got into just the right sort of temper; not so easy sometimes, especially in the case of Roy. And often there were other things needing his attention, for nobody expected "The Boss" to turn up until a short time before the show, when he would saunter into the ring in his shiny top hat and take the credit for everything. The next quarter of an hour would be occupied in grumbling at his subordinates for almost everything that they had done.

Yes, Fen thought it quite possible that daddy might be passing; the circus must be close by for Mr. Nevill to have chosen the hotel. Fen felt she wanted to see her father more than she wanted anything in the world just then. Partly because she wanted to be justified in what she had done, but a great deal more because she wanted to cheer him and take care

of him, and make up for what Mr. Nevill had said.

But no thin figure, with empty sleeve pinned across the breast, passed the window from either direction; instead, a very ill-tempered voice sounded in the passage. Mr. Nevill had come in by the back way, and, quite plainly, something was very wrong. Fen began to feel a little uneasy about her promise to the boy. Suppose the boss refused to let her have the pass? Well, she must do her very best to get him into a good temper.

The door was kicked open, and Mr. Nevill came in, preceded by the odour of a very rank cigar and wearing a seedy Homburg on one side of his large head.

“Hallo!” Fen said.

Mr. Nevill gave vent to a strong, a very strong ejaculation of astonishment.

“Yes, of course you’re surprised to see me,” Fen said cheerfully. “I couldn’t tell anyone ahead, because I didn’t know myself. How’s business?”

Mr. Nevill did not remove his hat. He broke into a furious tirade, in which Fenella’s desertion, her father’s confounded cough and general inefficiency, and the laziness and stupidity

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of the Sheringham audiences in failing to support him, were all inexplicably entangled with a torrent of vituperation.

Fen listened, trying to get at something. "Isn't my daddy well?"

Mr. Nevill didn't know and didn't care. It appeared that Ferne's adjectival cough spoilt business, and an inspector had warned Mr. Nevill, and Ferne should go, confound him, the very second Mr. Nevill had got a man to replace him; he was no earthly good with the lions as he was, and Fen could get along out with her blessed father; he, Mr. Nevill, wasn't going to have a brat hanging round who had spoilt his business by deserting him just as she was beginning to be worth about half of what he paid her. (It certainly did not look at all promising for the free pass.)

Fen tried to be conciliatory. "I'm so sorry business hasn't been good, but I'm sure it can't be daddy's cough that is to blame. Could you let him have a few days' holiday if I come back to the business—anyhow, while he's away?"

Mr. Nevill stopped storming, and looked at her. "Your confounded fool of a father has handed you over to the nobs, hasn't he?"

"You can't be handed over; besides, he only wanted me to try how I liked it," Fen said.

"And didn't you?"

"So-so; but I'd rather get daddy a holiday."

"He won't let you do it."

"Oh, I think he will, if I beg hard."

"It would be very inconvenient, and the men are all afraid to clean the cage now Roy's so cranky——" Mr. Nevill broke off on that, biting his thumb nail. "Still, your father will certainly go into consumption if I don't——"

"Mr. Nevill, do let him go. I'll look after the lions and keep them quiet, while the men are cleaning, you know I will."

A cunning look came into Mr. Nevill's prominent dark eyes.

"Suppose your father refuses to let you—not that he'll be able to say anything about you much longer——"

"I'm sure he won't refuse, just for a few days—to get well in."

Mr. Nevill pulled a penny bottle of ink towards himself, and took from its cheap rack a rather dirty sheet of hotel paper.

"Look here, my dear, you just sign a paper saying you'll take your father's place while he's

away, and I'll tell you what I'll do for you. I'll send the poor chap to the sea for a week or so, to lose that cough of his, I swear I will. What do you say to that?"

"You're ever so much nicer and kinder than I thought you were, Mr. Nevill," Fen exclaimed ecstatically.

He wrote quickly on the hotel paper:

"I, Fenella Ferne, promise to act as my father's substitute in his work in Mr. Nevill's Circus until his return."

He read over what he had written, pressing a dirty thumb upon it, and showed her where to sign. Fen signed happily. All was turning out splendidly, and Mr. Nevill was showing himself very much kinder than he had ever shown himself before.

"And now can I go to daddy?" she asked, as soon as she had signed her "Fenella Ferne."

"Well, he isn't here to-day. I got so anxious about him that I packed him off to consult a doctor, poor chap," Mr. Nevill told her. "That was why I was in such a bad temper when I came in. I'd just had a message from him, saying he would be kept, and I was wondering

how to carry on. It'll be all right now, and we've still got your clothes all ready, and your father will be back to-night. So sit down and have some dinner, for you haven't any too much time before the show. I've got a note to write, and it must be done at once."

Fen was hungry, for she had gone over to the gym without waiting for milk or more than that one biscuit, and the Cliff Dene breakfast was a distant memory.

An untidy waiter, of rather doubtful nationality and very doubtful cleanliness, had brought in the meal. Mr. Nevill informed him that the young lady was staying to lunch with him. She sat down at the corner of the table, on which the waiter had spread a half tablecloth spotted with gravy stains, and ate with appetite, while Mr. Nevill wrote a note and then a cheque, which he enclosed. He rang the bell.

"Let someone take this note round to the circus at once. It's urgent."

The waiter took it and went out. Mr. Nevill sat down beside Fenella, and poured himself out a glass of beer.

"That's a good day's work done," he remarked, with satisfaction.

Fen took the opportunity of asking him

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about the pass. He said "Yes" without hesitation. He was still in an amazingly good temper.

Fen made a hearty lunch, though she was conscious through all her hunger that the food tasted different, somehow, from the food which had been served to her lately. She wondered vaguely if she were growing fine, that she noticed the gravy was greasy, and the forks bore witness to the last meal, and Mr. Nevill's table manners were not pretty. But that gentleman was certainly more affable than she had ever known him, and though she could not get him to tell her to which seaside place he would send her father to cure him, he repeatedly assured her that she should not repent her share of the bargain.

Fen might not have been so sure of that if she had caught even a glimpse of that note which the boss had ordered should be taken to the circus at once. It was very short, but there was a good deal in it for all its shortness.

"DEAR FERNE,—Enclosed cheque in settlement of all owed to you, and it's a jolly sight more than you deserve. I've got your substitute, so don't you show your face about the

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circus again. I've had more than enough of you. Get off to a workhouse infirmary and die there, for all I care. J. NEVILL."

But Fen had not seen the note, and she thought Mr. Nevill unusually kind.

"Had enough?" he questioned affably. "Then we'll come along to the show."

"Where is daddy staying? Anywhere near?" Fen asked, as they walked past the bar and out from the fusty passage into a purer air.

"'Pon my word, I can't say."

"Somewhere close to the circus pitch, I expect. Anyhow, Mademoiselle Mignon is sure to know," Fen said.

"Oh, I'll find out for you before the show is over," Mr. Nevill assured her.

"But daddy will be there before the end, of course. Why, there is no one else to carry on with the lion stunt."

"I tell you I don't know," Mr. Nevill said, rather irritably. "It depends when he gets back from this doctor chap. . . . I—I had thought the lion business might have to come out altogether this time, but it's all right now I've got you. That will draw for to-morrow, anyhow. Here we are."

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Fen thought that Mr. Nevill was rather oddly laboured in his explanations. He was generally a good deal more glib. But she was thinking far too much about the meeting with daddy to give much attention to anything else. What a nuisance that the doctor might keep him! Still, it had been quite kind of Mr. Nevill to send him to a doctor and it would really be lovely to be able to tell him that all the doctor ordered could be carried out. The doctors had always before said rest, and sea or country air, and feeding up. Now she had come back and Mr. Nevill was willing to let her act as her father's substitute during the week or so he was away, all would be well. And daddy couldn't be so very angry with her for running away from the chance he had made such a sacrifice to give her, when it had all fitted in so conveniently.

Here they were entering the circus; she knew the queer, acrid smell of leaking gas, and stale sawdust, and animals wild and otherwise. The hammering from the rear, the tattoo from the hoofs of impatient horses, and occasionally a roar from the lions' den, startling to the nerves of anybody unaccustomed to it—all this had been the everyday background of her life

till less than a week ago. Only the smell seemed more unpleasant, the circus more draughty and more noisy, and the make-shift appliances more tawdry than she had remembered. Strange that a few days only of another kind of life could make so big a difference.

Mr. Nevill left her at the entrance to the ladies' dressing-rooms, and Fen ran along the familiar canvas passage and burst into the little room which she had always shared with Zuletta and Mademoiselle Mignon. They were both there now ; Mademoiselle Mignon, sitting shivering on the table, in her short-sleeved baby frock, while her tall attendant put on her shoes and socks for her as though she were the doll she looked like ; and Zuletta, staring at her own reflection in the dusty little glass, as she applied rouge with a hare's foot.

Both looked cold and tired and dissatisfied, but Mademoiselle Mignon at least ceased to look unhappy as she glanced up to catch sight of Fen in the doorway. She knew her at once, in spite of the well-cut coat and skirt, the expensive shoes, and pretty velour hat, which made Fen so unlike the shabby little mackintoshed figure to whom she had said good-night on the previous Saturday.

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"Fenella, my dear! You back? What *are* you doing?"

"I've signed on with the boss till daddy comes back. He's to go to the sea and get well."

Both women, the midget and the dancer, turned and stared at Fen with faces aghast. "You've *signed* on with the boss?"

CHAPTER XI

ROY'S TOOTHACHE

THE tone, more than the words, gave Fen a certain uncomfortable sensation. She looked blankly at the dwarf. Mademoiselle Mignon went on almost at once :

“Your father doesn’t know, does he?”

“Not yet. Of course I’m going to tell him directly he comes back.”

“You cut along and do it now,” the dwarf advised. “Don’t you go making any promises to the boss till you hear what your dad thinks. To my mind he did quite right to get you out of all this if he had the chance. You go and find out if he’s agreeable to your chucking yourself back into it again for any reason whatsoever, before you get into your tamer’s kit.”

“I can’t,” Fen objected. “At least, not yet. He isn’t back.”

“Yes, he is—of course he is. Who else can tackle the lions?”

“He’s at the doctor’s, isn’t he? The boss

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said he sent him to a doctor because of his cough."

"Sent his grandmother!" Zuletta interrupted. "Catch the boss doing anything for anybody free, gratis and for nothing. Mr. Ferne was here a quarter of an hour ago trying to do something for Roy's toothache, and, incidentally, his temper."

"What?" Fen could not believe her ears.

"Daddy here! Why, Mr. Nevill told me——"

"What is, and what the boss says, ain't always just identical," remarked the dwarf. "Run out and find your daddy, child. I don't suppose he's gone to dress yet, Roy being so cranky."

Fen ran. No need to direct her to the lions' cage. She knew where it always stood, and even if she hadn't, the angry growling of a savage, old, ill-tempered lion would have been sufficient guide. Close to the cage she ran full tilt into one of the men who worked under her father.

"George, where's daddy?" she demanded quickly.

George was looking hot and worried in spite of the raw cold of the winter's day.

"Great snakes, if it ain't Fenella! Where's your daddy? Wish I knew. Roy is just about

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as ugly as I've ever known him, and Mr. Ferne was off as soon as he got the note, with only just the word to me that the lion stunt wasn't on this afternoon, and blessed if I know what's to be done with that there cranky beast."

"Where's the boss?"

Fen was not usually suspicious, but she knew well enough from her old experiences that the boss wasn't straight, and she knew that her old friends, Mademoiselle Mignon and George, were speaking the truth. Unless daddy had come back most extraordinarily early from the doctor, Mr. Nevill had told her a lie about his movements. And where could he have gone now?

"Where's the boss, George?" she repeated.

"Here," said the voice of Mr. Nevill behind her. "Here, and wanting to know why you, that have signed on to work for me, aren't getting ready as you should be, instead of gossiping with a drunken rascal that'll get the sack with the worst character I ever gave to anyone if he isn't careful."

"Oh, Mr. Nevill. George wasn't doing anything—only just telling me about daddy," Fen said eagerly. "But why was he here? You said he had gone to the doctor."

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Mr. Nevill became rather rough and bullying in manner. "Don't stand there arguing with me. You get along to your own business and leave me to mine."

"My daddy is my business," Fen told him. "Where is he?"

"*Will* you go along as you're told!"

"When you've told me about my daddy. Did you send him to the doctor at all——"

Nevill moved a step towards her, threateningly. "None of your sauce!"

"Did you?" Fen repeated steadily.

"I suppose the fool didn't go," the boss suggested, but he could not meet her eyes, and Fen knew that he was lying.

"I'll go and see if I can find him. I can dress after the show starts—there's time," she said.

Mr. Nevill laid a heavy hand upon her shoulder.

"You'd better understand me, kid. If you do what you're told I'll play fair enough by you, and pay you a salary that there isn't a brat your age would get anywhere, and be kind to you into the bargain. But if you try arguing and airs, I'll have you remember that I can have the law on you. You're bound to me. Go and get

ready. I'm going to put the lions on early this afternoon, Roy being so cranky."

Fen didn't see it all just then, but she felt that she was trapped. She took it standing up; it took more than the boss in an ugly temper, or even an old lion in the same condition, to scare Fenella Ferne. She just looked Mr. Nevill in the face, and then turned round without a word and went back to the dressing-room.

When she had gone George made one more effort upon her behalf.

"You're not going to send that little thing into the lions' cage till her dad comes back, are you, sir? Roy's not safe to-day. Wait till Mr. Ferne gets back, anyway."

"Mind your own business, and look sharp about it, if you want any more business in this circus to mind," Mr. Nevill told him, threateningly. "You'd better, you——"

A string of unprintable adjectives followed.

George turned away and went to help in the moving of the lions' great cage to a handy position for wheeling to the ring later, with a very heavy heart.

Nimrod and Alexander were sitting up in the cage, looking expectantly for the meat

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which was always given them just before the show; but Roy lay huddled into a corner of the cage, moving his head restlessly from side to side, and at intervals uttering those low but none the less appalling roars. George was experienced enough to know what those sounds meant. In a few minutes Nimrod and Alexander would begin to roar if their dinner was delayed, but that sound would be different. Roy was in pain and angry with the universe, not just inquiring in no measured accents why the dickens they didn't hurry up there with the lunch?

George looked at the restlessly moving head, at the bloodshot eyes.

"Not well, got a cold, or toothache, or something," he said to one of the three circus hands who were helping him to move the cage. "He didn't ought to be on show to-day, more especially with a child. They ought to drive him right into the spare cage, if little Miss Fen is to do the job without her dad to look after her."

The three men expressed their views of the boss's behaviour with extraordinary vigour, considering that they had to speak in a whisper owing to the boss's inconvenient habit of appearing when he wasn't wanted, and they were all out of breath from pushing the lions' cage.

FEN'S FIRST TERM

In the canvas dressing-room Fen was struggling into her lion-tamer's costume, with her firm little mouth set in a line of great determination. She was going to keep her promise for this afternoon and give the public the performance they expected, in company with Nimrod, Alexander and poor toothachy, fractious old Roy, but afterwards—afterwards—Fen meant to know what the boss was really doing about her daddy.

She was quickly ready in the jacket and breeches of dark green with their silver buttons and facings, the slender whip lying ready to her hand on the dirty deal table, strewn with Zuletta's paints and powder.

Mademoiselle Mignon, sitting patiently, wrapped in a grey shawl, with her tiny feet dangling from the corner of the table, looked anxiously at Fen.

"My dear, you're never going into the lions without your father? It's not right."

"I'm not afraid," Fen said briefly; "but Roy with the toothache is absolutely nothing to what the boss will be when I say what I've got to say to him after the show."

Mademoiselle Mignon spoke to the attendant who carried her to and from the circus and took care of her.

ROY'S TOOTHACHE

"Never mind about me now, Sarah. If you put a chair for me to get down on I shall do, or this child will help me. Run out and see if you can find Mr. Ferne anywhere about, and tell him Fenella is here. I'm sure he doesn't know."

"Don't you go falling off the table then," Sarah said austerey, and so departed on her errand.

When she had gone Fen turned to that good friend of hers, sitting shivering on the end of the littered table.

"Why did you do that?"

"Because your father hadn't any intention of being away from his job when I saw him half an hour ago," Mademoiselle Mignon said succinctly. "Because if he's gone, it's because he's been told to go by the boss. What have you been promising, Fen, my dear?"

Fen told her, and as she did so the rather tuneless blare of the brass band announced that the circus had begun. Zuletta gave a weary sigh, and administered a last dab of powder to her nose. A roar of applause told of the arrival in the ring of Big Ben and Snaky Jim, who always opened the acrobatic performance.

"Seems to me you may have been a bit of a donkey, child, but there's no doubting that the

boss has been more than a bit of something else," she said, and then dashed through the dressing-room door that never seemed able to keep out draughts or anything of that kind, and arrived in the ring with a tremendous pirouette—the same, as a matter of fact, that Fen had copied on the bar, to the horror of her Cousin Angela. A combined roar of cheering and clapping greeted her—Zuletta was popular with her audiences.

"Then you think the boss has sent daddy away?" Fen asked with a sinking heart. She had remembered what George had said about the note her father had received.

"Yes, I do, and I'll tell you what else I think," Mignon said, with a firmness that seemed odd from anyone so tiny. "I think you've got to go along to the boss and tell him you don't go near that cranky, ill-tempered beast unless your father's with you, as he ought to be. That will bring him to his bearings fast enough, for we're not doing any too well here, and the lions are what most people come to see."

"I don't know about this afternoon—I promised, you know," Fen said. "But I shan't stay in the circus unless he does what he promised for daddy, and that's what I'll tell him straight."

ROY'S TOOTHACHE

The call came for Mademoiselle Mignon. Fen lifted the tiny creature carefully off the table. Her little carriage, with its team of Persian cats, would be waiting outside in charge of a boy. Mademoiselle Mignon cast one glance at Fen's nice school clothes, thrown down all anyhow among the sordid accessories of the circus.

"And when you've told him, you take my advice and go back to the good home where your father sent you," she advised. "That kind isn't to be lightly thrown away, you take my word for it. Do you think if I had a home to go to I'd be showing a gaping crowd how much smaller I am than other folk?"

With which she went through to her fairy coach, a funny pathetic little figure, trying so hard to look young and happy. Fen was left alone with her thoughts.

So they all considered that she had done wrong to come back—George, and Mademoiselle Mignon and Zuletta, and the raw-boned, austere Sarah—and so far her coming seemed to have done her father not good, but harm. They all thought that he had been sent away, not to consult the doctor, as the boss had said,

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but just sacked, because the boss had tricked her—Fen—into promising to do his work while he was away. She had been tricked, there was no doubt of that. The boss had not been thinking of daddy and his cough, in the very least, but just how to get the tamer who would be most popular with his audiences.

Fen thought of Mademoiselle Mignon's words. After all, though she had promised to take daddy's place, it was in return for a definite promise that something should be done for daddy. Fen decided then and there that she would not fulfil her part of the contract if the boss didn't fulfil his.

Mademoiselle Mignon had left her little wrist-watch on the table with the grown-up clothes that she wore whenever she was allowed to do so. Fen glanced hastily at the time. Three o'clock only. Mademoiselle Mignon could be relied upon to be another ten minutes at least in the ring with her performing cats—more, if the audience were enthusiastic. And after that there would be Pogo, the Shetland pony, who stood upon his hind legs and tossed sugar off the end of his nose into his mouth like a dog, and Signor Orlando with his horses. . . . Oh, she would have plenty of time! Fen caught up

ROY'S TOOTHACHE

her big school overcoat and slipped quietly out to reconnoitre.

But fortune was against her. Where the dressing-room passage gave on to the ring Mr. Nevill was standing, surveying the performance of Mademoiselle Mignon with a scowl, which was due to the fact that the bitter wind was making the poor little woman look shrivelled and old through all her paint.

"Getting past—she'll have to go soon," Mr Nevill remarked, with a brutal laugh, to Signor Orlando, who stood beside him ready to go on.

And Signor Orlando sniggered and said: "Forty, if she's a day."

Fen felt as though she hated them both.

The boss was closing the exit to her; she had to face him now.

"Mr. Nevill, daddy was here this afternoon, where is he now?" she demanded.

"Get back to your dressing-room till you're wanted," growled the boss.

"I shan't be wanted at all if I don't know, and know the truth," Fen told him undauntedly. "I'm just not going on with the lions if you don't answer me."

Mr. Nevill spat out a furious oath, and catching her by the shoulder pushed her before

FEN'S FIRST TERM

him back into the dressing-room. From the lion's cage came Roy's angry roar, protesting at everything, but most of all his toothache.

"You'll go!" the boss snarled. "You can't get out of it. I can make you."

He picked up her whip.

"If you dare touch me with that, I——"
Fen cried passionately.

George burst in upon them with little ceremony.

"Beg pardon, sir, but Roy is getting real ugly to the noise. If you could give a notion where Mr. Ferne is . . . none of us dares handle the brute."

Mr. Nevill dropped his whip.

"Tell Orlando we'll have the lion stunt on at once. Roy'll be right enough when he's back of the circus and quiet again," he said. He turned threateningly upon Fenella. "Going to fulfil your contract?"

George got between her and the boss. George had a wife and children, and he hated and feared the lions at all times, but he spoke up.

"No, boss, you can't ask it of her. If you can't or won't find Mr. Ferne, I'll go along in to the lions."

Fenella would not have given in to the boss's

threats, or even to his actual violence, but she knew that George meant what he said.

“I’ll go,” she promised. “Roy won’t be ugly with me. I’m all right. But when we’ve done the lion stunt——”

She stopped short.

“Get the cage in,” ordered Mr. Nevill.

George went unwillingly, taking Fen with him. Mr. Nevill looked after her with a scowl; then whispered something to Orlando, who nodded. From across the ring came menacingly Roy’s sullen, threatening roar.

CHAPTER, XII

WHAT ANGELA TOLD

NO one discovered Fenella's absence till the first gong sounded for luncheon. Of course everybody knew before break was over that Fenella Ferne had been discovered walking on the bar in defiance of Miss Macdonald's orders, and had been sent to her room in disgrace. The general opinion was that she was a "silly ass" to have done it, but Billy at least considered that Angela's presence there was some excuse. "Angela was probably exasperating her," she explained to a circle of friends; "Angela is enough to exasperate a saint at times, you know. Hope Miss Macdonald won't be very down upon her." The "her" needless to say, referred to Fen, not Angela. The school in general did not share Miss Macdonald's view that Angela required sympathy.

"I don't suppose she'll be half as much in a row as anyone else would be," Pat said hopefully. "She got off very lightly over that

bolting with the horse. She'll just get lectured, and then be allowed to come down to dinner, you'll see."

It looked as though Pat was right, for Miss Macdonald met the girls as they came pouring in, the players hot and dishevelled, and players and spectators alike extremely cheery, after a keenly contested and exciting net-ball match. She singled out Billy. "Wilhelmina, will you go up to her room and tell Fenella Ferne to come down to me in my study."

"Yes, Miss Macdonald." Billy hesitated, standing awkwardly upon one foot. "Miss Macdonald, please, I really don't think Fenella meant . . . she doesn't understand quite. . . . I mean she . . ."

"You need not be afraid ; I am not intending to be very severe with Fenella," Miss Macdonald said, quite kindly, and not at all as though she was offended. "I only want her for two minutes before luncheon."

Billy sped off, wondering how she had dared ; wondering still more why she had not been snubbed for daring—but feeling decidedly comforted about Fenella. Of course she had been a "priceless idiot" to go and walk on the bar not two hours after Miss Macdonald had forbidden

it so decidedly, but she had been punished, and if Fen had the sense to say she knew she had been wrong and wouldn't do it again, it would be quite all right. Very likely you didn't have to do much obeying of rules in a circus, and Miss Macdonald had remembered that and judged mercifully.

Billy thought that Angela ought to have managed to stop Fen from doing anything so idiotic; it was absurd to say that she had not been able to, which was how Angela had excused herself when attacked by several angry people, who thought that Fenella had been given hard measure, and saw no reason for keeping their opinions to themselves. Still, those sort of things did happen sometimes in the best regulated establishments. Billy sped up to the room shared by Angela and Fen, prepared to point out to her new friend that there was "nothing to write home about," so to speak.

But her kind intentions were frustrated, for the very good reason that there was no one on whom to exercise them. The pretty little blue-and-white room was quite empty.

Billy frowned. "Silly ass!" she said

To leave your room when you had been told to stay in it was a serious offence. Miss Mac-

donald would not be merciful to a double disobedience. Why couldn't Fenella have had the sense to stay where she had been sent? Billy went downstairs again slowly and dejectedly. One would have to tell Miss Macdonald, she supposed.

Just as she reached the hall the gong sounded, and the girls began to file across to the big dining-room for lunch. Billy stood still watching, almost praying that Fen might be among them. If she were—well, unless Miss Macdonald asked a direct question, nothing need be said about Fen's reprehensible conduct in leaving her room—Billy wasn't going to mention it, that was certain. But Fen wasn't there.

"Wilhelmina, what are you doing? Go in with the rest," Miss Osric ordered, as the staff followed the girls.

"Please, Miss Osric, may I be excused a moment, I have to take a message to Miss Macdonald," Billy said heavily, and so went to the study.

Miss Macdonald was there, but not alone. She was talking very pleasantly to a certain Colonel Wrotham, whose youngest girl was at Cliff Dene House. Billy knew him, for he had twice taken three of Nancy Wrotham's friends

out to lunch at the hotel with Nancy, and had been particularly lavish with ices and strawberries.

He turned round as Billy came in and recognized her.

"Hallo, it's the redoubtable Billy, isn't it? Well, are you coming out to lunch with Nancy and me to-day, if Miss Macdonald will allow us, and it is 'Yes' about the circus, too, isn't it, Miss Macdonald?"

"Don't you think circuses rather infectious?" suggested Miss Macdonald.

"Not at all—too many draughts," the colonel answered promptly. "Come—a real proper appreciation of the circus is a thing that you lose with your teens, and this does seem to be a rather unusually good show, by all accounts."

Four jolly, cheery Wrotham girls had passed through Miss Macdonald's hands, and she was well accustomed to Colonel Wrotham and his requests. She smiled benignly.

"Well, I am sure the girls will enjoy it. Go and put on your outdoor things, Wilhelmina," Miss Macdonald said. "Colonel Wrotham has kindly asked Monica Symington as well—tell her to get ready too. Colonel Wrotham is going to take you to lunch at the hotel, and then over

to Sheringham in his car to see the circus which was there. The performance begins at two-thirty."

"Oh, how gorgeously exciting!" Billy burst out joyfully. "Thank you *ever* so much."

Then she remembered her errand.

"Miss Macdonald, Fenella wasn't there!"

"Not there? Do you mean that she has left her room?" Miss Macdonald looked serious.

"Yes—at least, perhaps she thought she was to come down to dinner—she's very new," Billy urged, making the best of it for her friend.

"Well, go and get ready—you mustn't keep Colonel Wrotham waiting," Miss Macdonald said decidedly, and Billy went, though less joyfully than she would have expected.

Fenella would be in a real row now, that was certain. Billy was more than half inclined to give up the expedition and see if there were anything to be done for her, but that wouldn't be much good really. Fenella was nearly certain to be in detention or something after being deliberately disobedient for the second time in one day.

But before the best coats and skirts were on, Miss Macdonald appeared in Billy's room, looking worried.

"Wilhelmina, you seem to be most in

Fenella's confidence : have you any idea where she can have gone ? ”

Billy stopped in the act of hooking her skirt and stared.

“ Isn't she here ? ”

“ We can't find her anywhere about the house or garden,” Miss Macdonald said anxiously.

“ Perhaps she has gone to see the child she rescued at the weir,” Billy suggested. “ Couldn't you ask ? Colonel — what's - his - name ? — her grandfather—is on the phone, and she said he asked her to come again soon.”

“ Thank you, Wilhelmina. That is a good suggestion,” Miss Macdonald said, her brow clearing. “ It is, of course, very wrong indeed of Fenella, but, as you say, she is new. I will telephone to Colonel Templeton.”

“ Please do let me know if she's all right, Miss Macdonald,” Billy urged, wondering a little how she dared.

But Miss Macdonald did not seem to be annoyed.

“ Yes, I will let you know,” she promised, and went out, rather quickly for Miss Macdonald.

Billy hurried into her coat, hat and best shoes, and was at the door ready dressed, with her

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gloves in her hand, when Miss Macdonald came back.

"Colonel Templeton has seen nothing of her."

"Angela might know," Billy suggested, but doubtfully. She could not imagine Fenella taking Angela into her confidence for any reason whatever.

Miss Macdonald was still very quiet, but she was looking anxious. "Run down and send Angela up to me. She may be able to tell us something."

Angela appeared, looking scared. "It isn't my fault," she began, before she was well inside the door.

"No one suggested that it was, my dear," Miss Macdonald said, looking keenly at her, Billy noticed. "But you were with your cousin last, Angela, and you may, I hope, be able to help us as to her whereabouts. You know that she has run away from us?"

"Wilhelmina told me, Miss Macdonald." Angela looked more inclined to cry than to talk.

"Don't look so unhappy—no one suggested that you did not do your best to help Fenella to settle down among us and to give her a fair

idea of our rules and regulations, and try to be helpful and tactful towards her natural ignorance of the school world," Miss Macdonald said very quietly and pleasantly. "If she was unhappy among us—unhappy enough to wish to run away, I am sure it cannot have been your fault in any way, Angela. You knew, as no one else here could do, how hard this wild little soul would find it to fall into line here, but you feel that you did everything you could, don't you?"

It was to Billy's credit that she gave no hint of her opinions, even by a look.

Angela stood staring up at Miss Macdonald for a moment in dead silence. Then she suddenly turned very red. "No, Miss Macdonald, I wasn't nice to her, and I didn't try to help her. The bar business was my fault, not Fenella's. I did it first—to show off—and then of course, she did, especially as she was better at it than I am. I made her disobedient, really, and then, when you came in, I didn't tell. I expect that's why she's run away—it's all my fault, and now I suppose something awful will happen to her to punish me as I deserve."

Billy's eyes were as round as saucers, but she still refrained from comment. Miss Macdonald spoke, and she spoke quite gently.

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"I am glad you told me, Angela, my dear. We will talk a little later. Just now, we have to find Fenella; I don't think you need imagine that dreadful things will happen to her, because you did not manage to be kind or fair the first time that you tried. The second time, when she comes back, will be quite different, won't it? Now you are going to help me—where do you think she would go?"

"Aunt Frances was nice to her; she likes Aunt Frances," Angela said, in a low voice. "I think perhaps she might go to her."

Miss Macdonald's troubled face cleared a little.

"Yes, and the Castle wouldn't be altogether beyond walking distance for such a determined person as Fenella. That is a good thought, Angela; I will wire to Miss A'Court at once. So don't be too anxious, girls; I think it most probable that Fenella is already safe at her grandfather's house, or at least on her way there. Wilhelmina, you had better go now—you will keep everybody waiting."

She turned to go downstairs; Billy ran after her. "Miss Macdonald, please, I don't think I care much about going to the circus if—till we know that Fenella is all right. Would you

mind, awfully, explaining to Colonel Wrotham, so that it isn't rude? I——"

"My dear, I wish you to go," Miss Macdonald said quite decidedly. "You could not do anything for Fenella if you stayed, and we cannot hear for some time, Lord Roswell not being on the telephone. To refuse his invitation now would be most discourteous to Colonel Wrotham; run away and apologize for keeping him waiting. As to Fenella, I don't suppose her aunt will bring her back until the evening. You will probably see her quite as soon as Angela and I do."

Billy could not wait, for Nancy and Monica were already at the front door, and Colonel Wrotham's chauffeur was starting his engine. But she looked back at Angela, standing forlornly in the middle of the pretty bedroom for two, from which one was missing by her fault, and said: "Buck up, old thing." Then she ran, a little comforted by Miss Macdonald's last remark. "You will probably see Fenella as soon as Angela and I do."

It so happened that the forecast was more accurate than anybody could have guessed!

CHAPTER XIII

ON THE TRACK

FRANCES A'COURT was writing letters in her own pretty sitting-room just before lunch, when her father marched in unexpectedly, a most unusually grim expression upon his handsome old face, and holding an orange envelope in his hand.

"Frances, that fellow Ferne has broken faith with us. The child has run away to him."

Frances laid down her pen in consternation. "Fenella has run away from school?"

"Yes, the Head Mistress has just wired to say so, and goodness only knows how much time that has wasted. I suppose I shall have to give in to your ridiculous ideas and have the phone installed."

"Had the child only just gone?" Frances interrupted. The subject of the phone's usefulness had been one of dispute between her father and herself for many years, and she had heard all that could be said about it many times over.

“That’s what they don’t know—can’t think why they don’t. The child was punished—sent to her room soon after eleven this morning, and now she’s missing. The only people in the place whom she knows have seen nothing of her. Miss What’s-her-name seemed to think she would have come here, but of course she hasn’t.”

“She may still be on her way; it’s a tremendous distance to walk,” Frances said. “My poor little Fenella, I am afraid she must have been very unhappy at Cliff Dene House to take this step. I’ll take the car and go to meet her, shall I, father?”

“She won’t come here; I’m sure of it,” Lord Roswell told her obstinately. “The child has plenty of grit, she’s her mother all over—I’m sure she wouldn’t come home just because she couldn’t stick a little trouble—she’s not that sort. No, it’s that father of hers who has been getting at her; I am certain that’s it. You know what I have always felt about the fellow.”

“Father, you’re not fair. When he behaved so well and unselfishly about the child, you never took into account what it must have cost him to give her up.”

“I don’t like him and I don’t trust him,”

repeated Lord Roswell. "He has enticed her back; I'm sure of it. I'll tell you what I'm going to do; I'm going over to Rothbury at once to confront him and fetch Fenella away."

"But, father, don't you know that the circus left Rothbury on Saturday night, the night that I fetched the child away?"

"I can find out where it has gone, I suppose," Lord Roswell answered, so sharply that Frances knew he must be feeling very much worried. "Where were they staying—that fellow Ferne and the child?"

Frances had a sudden flash of memory. She heard Fenella's anxious voice in the darkness of the car.

"Mrs. Renton will never fry the sausages crisp enough for daddy."

At the time she had just been amused and a little touched, but the name had meant nothing. Now it came as a gleam of light in the darkness.

"Mrs. Renton was the landlady, and I expect one could get a list of the people who let lodgings. I will tell Gunter to look after Fenella if she turns up in our absence, and come with you, father, if I may. But I must tell you that I think you are wrong about Fenella's father. The child has talked to me

about him, and I don't believe for one instant he would do a shabby thing by you."

"Then where do you think she has gone?" demanded Lord Roswell.

"I think that she may be on her way to us now—Miss Macdonald had, I suppose, no idea when she left Cliff Dene House—or, I think, she may have gone back to the circus of her own accord. She is proud, you know, dear, and I think she resented our attitude towards her father——"

"You may say what you like. I believe you'll find the fellow has something to do with her running away," Lord Roswell said stubbornly. "Get your outdoor things on, Frances. I suppose I shall have to go in the car as we're in a hurry."

Mrs. Renton not being among the select and important landladies of the town, finding her rooms took time, but they were unearthed at last. Sordid little rooms in a back street, with a big dirty square of cardboard—"Apartments to Let"—in a smeary window on the ground floor, and above the door the terser legend—"Beds."

"Pah!" ejaculated Lord Roswell explosively.

"Dear father, do try not to look too disgusted or we shan't get our information," whispered Frances. "Probably Mrs. Renton has a very high opinion of her rooms."

"If I had known, I should have written before," Lord Roswell said. "Imagine Dorothy's child being brought up in these horrible surroundings."

Mrs. Renton was dining—a dinner which seemed by the smell to consist entirely of stale fish, boiled greens and beer. She interviewed them rather truculently in the passage at first. But Frances' gracious manner was not without effect, and they were ushered into the best sitting-room, and shown a photograph of the late Mr. Renton in a tightly buttoned suit of light checks which enclosed him with difficulty, and provided with gruesome details of his last illness before they were allowed to state their business.

Frances was Lord Roswell's favourite daughter, and she managed to restrain too visible impatience from him during this infliction; and at the end they were rewarded.

"Mr. Ferne—ho yus—he and his little gal was here, quite the gentleman he was, and she for one hadn't made no complaints about his

cough, though it put about the other lodgers something hawful. Where had the circus gone? Yes, he did say—now, what was the name?—she'd 'ave it in a minute, but what with having all she had to remember, and the headache something cruel, which some little black pills a travelling gentleman had given her mother in exchange for a good meal of bread and cheese and beer, and warranted to cure asthma, liver, bile, 'eart and 'eadache, and to take ten years haff your hage hevery time you took 'em—didn't do nothing to cure 'er, though she'd taken the box-full—pore mother dying sudden, all along of a fishbone sticking in her throat, not a week after she'd bought the box, and wonderful and mysterious is the ways of Providence—well, now she all but had it—something with a 's' it was—there now! Sheringham."

Frances did the thanking; Lord Roswell was in a fever to be off. They got into the car, and it was a quarter to three.

"Drive like the deuce," Lord Roswell snapped at the chauffeur. "Sheringham."

"After all, we follow the road nearly to Cliff Dene House," Frances thought to herself consolingly. "We shall meet Fenella if she is on her way to me."

It was well after three before, even with driving that certainly paid scant attention to the speed limit, the car came into Sheringham and slowed down in answer to the indignant mandate of a policeman. And there had been no sign of Fenella all the way. "We must ask where to find the circus, father dear," Frances said gently.

She leaned from the car to put the question to a little girl wheeling a perambulator, but the little girl was so surprised at being addressed by such a beautiful lady in such a beautiful car that she was bereft of speech, and only stared stupidly.

Lord Roswell gave vent to an exclamation of impatience, and a man who had been walking along the pavement behind the child, his head bent, looked up. Frances saw at once that one sleeve, the left, was empty and pinned across his chest.

He raised his hat. "Excuse me, madam; I can tell you the whereabouts of Nevill's Circus. Take the third on the left, and the second on the right by a small hotel, and you——"

He was interrupted. "It's—it's the man himself," Lord Roswell cried, and then he spoke

sternly. "Mr. Ferne, what have you done with the child?"

Frances saw Andrew Ferne's thin face go white. "Fenella?"

"Fenella," Lord Roswell snapped at him.

"You have her," Ferne said. "You know that you have taken her——"

"Don't be theatrical with me, my good fellow," Lord Roswell interrupted. "I had the child, it is true; but you have her now, and——"

"Father!" Frances broke in quite indignantly. She knew at once by the look upon Ferne's face that he knew nothing of Fenella's whereabouts, and that he was horribly afraid.

But when he spoke his voice was controlled, though rather stern. "Do you mean that you have lost her, Lord Roswell!"

"She has run away from the school where I had placed her. I thought that you——"

Lord Roswell paused. He was an honourable man himself, and, like his daughter, he had read something in the worn face and anxious eyes before him.

"I see that I was wrong in my suspicions; I beg your pardon for them, Ferne," he said.

"That's all right, sir," Fenella's father jerked

ut. "But please tell me more. When did he——"

"Won't you get into the car with us and help us find her?" Frances begged in her kind voice. "My father and I are very anxious about the poor child, of course, and very much perplexed too. Fenella has only been missing since 1.15 this morning; I mean, that she was safe at school then. At one o'clock she was gone, and the Head Mistress phoned to us. Now Cliff Dene House is near Yieldhill, which has a station; clearly she did not attempt to come to us, or we must have met her; therefore it seems likely that she tried to find you, only, of course, you would have known if she had come to the circus to look for you."

"I mightn't; I've been sacked," Ferne told them bitterly. "Only this afternoon—quite suddenly."

A flash of comprehension crossed his face. "I've got it—the dirty rascal! He has Fenella, my poor little girl, and that's why he didn't want me any more. He sacked me by letter, and told me not to show my face in the circus again. . . . I did wonder what he meant to do about the beasts, with Roy so cranky. Look here, sir, I must go after the child at once; don't

you see, that brute Nevill has put her in my place, and the lions aren't safe."

Lord Roswell grabbed him by the shoulder. "Jump into the car and come with us, man; you'll get there much quicker that way," he said cordially. "So that's your precious manager's little game, is it? But don't get into such a state about it; he hasn't a leg to stand on, and we'll descend on him together and carry the little monkey off at once, and leave him to manage his lions on his own."

"The lion performance comes quite at the end, too, doesn't it, Mr. Ferne?" Frances said reassuringly. "You and my father will have rescued Fenella long before she can run any risk."

"My daughter's right, but jump in—jump in," Lord Roswell said. "Drive for all you're worth, Mason!"

They came to the entrance of the circus. A door-keeper, more interested in the show itself than in possible late-comers, had to be recalled to his duties, while Lord Roswell fumed. Andrew Ferne, who had followed him closely, spoke in his ear.

"I'm going to try and get round at the back, Lord Roswell. If the boss is in the ring

"I can probably do it—if I can't I'll come back to you."

He slipped away. There was a great roar of cheering. Someone in the back row of the audience said loudly: "The pretty dear, it's a cruel shame," as Lord Roswell and Frances secured their tickets and pressed in.

A freckle-faced boy, with a wide smile, was clinging to one of the supports at the back, in order that he might see over the heads of the crowd, and cheering vociferously. Frances noticed him through all her terrible anxiety. She had known instantly to what the "pretty dear" and the "cruel shame" referred. Fenella was in the lions' cage.

Following her father closely as he pushed a way along the narrow gangway to the front seats, she was conscious of a very sudden hush that succeeded the cheering—a hush that had about it something almost sinister. And then—into the midst of that silence—a long-drawn breath of horror.

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE LIONS' CAGE

FENELLA stood still outside the lions' cage for three or four minutes before giving the signal to the attendant to slip the bars and let her in. It was not that she was afraid, but a lion-tamer learns from the first to study the positions of the great beasts and the state of their tempers before deciding what part of the performance will be possible.

Fen knew quite well that nothing would be easy to-day, and not everything would be possible. The lions were all roaring in a rather terrifying fashion ; but Nimrod and Alexander were merely mentioning to the world at large that the meal which was always given shortly before the cage was wheeled into the ring was nearly due, and people had better see to it that lunch wasn't late, or they would know the reason why ! Fen was accustomed to that noise and didn't mind it. It was Roy who gave her a certain feeling of distrust.

IN THE LIONS' CAGE

The old lion was lying in the far corner of the cage; but she could see that his huge head was moving restlessly from side to side, and his eyes were bloodshot. He was growling, not roaring, and his tail switched viciously to and fro; it was quite clear that he was in a very bad temper indeed.

Fen spoke to the attendant. "Have the flag and everything ready, but I may have to cut it a little short to-day—unless dinner cheers Roy up a bit."

The man nodded. Like George, he was looking troubled and uneasy. "That there brute, Roy, hadn't ought to be on show to-day," he muttered.

Another attendant brought the joints on an old tray. Nimrod and Alexander had healthy appetites, and made short work of a big joint apiece. As a rule, old Roy was in no way behind them, but to-day dinner seemed to have lost interest to him. He took no notice of the joint pushed through the opening for him, but continued that restless turning of his massive head from side to side.

"Wheel the cage on," ordered Mr. Nevill. "Get in, child."

"Boss, have Roy into the small cage first,"

pleaded that good fellow George in a low voice. " 'Twouldn't take but a minute, and he ain't *safe*."

" The public is expecting six lions ; d'you think I'm going to fob 'em off with two ? " Mr. Nevill demanded. " You can take a week's notice, George, and you, you brat, get on to it, or I'll have the law on you."

" I'm going ; there's no need to sack George," Fen said with dignity.

She grasped her slender whip firmly, took a last steady look at the lions, particularly Roy, and stepped through the opening, made quickly and nervously by George and the other man. She planted herself so as to face all three, and spoke sharply the familiar words of command that should have sent them all lying with their heads upon their huge fore-paws. Nimrod and Alexander, full-fed and comforted, obeyed the order ; Roy still moved restlessly, his bloodshot eyes never meeting her steady gaze. The great cage jerked and rumbled forward to the centre of the ring, the curtains drawn closely, making it intolerably stuffy. Fen kept her eyes fixed steadily on Roy in the glow of the electric bulb in the roof of the cage ; Roy's eyes had a nasty gleam in them to-day, and his growling was low

IN THE LIONS' CAGE

but continuous. Fen knew that she must keep her eyes upon the old lion, and all her wits about her for the whole time of the performance.

The cage stopped—not much of a jolt—George and his assistants had a wholesome dread of rousing Roy. The band broke into a brilliant blare, and the curtains were drawn back, as Fen gave her quick, decisive word of command. The crowd broke into a continuous roar of cheering as the child lion-tamer raised her hand, and two out of the three huge beasts surrounding her heaved to their haunches and obeyed her command. “Shake hands, Nimrod. Shake hands, Alexander.”

The huge paws touched her hand; Fen knew exactly how to put her fingers under the cushiony part between the deadly claws. Once only had she been careless and allowed a claw to draw blood. She remembered now daddy's expression of white dismay, and the speed with which he opened the bars and pulled her out of the cage before the lions had been conscious of the sight and smell of human blood and had their innate savagery aroused by it.

The trick was received with tumultuous applause; the enthusiasm was probably all the

greater from the unexpectedness of Fen's appearance. The Sheringham people visiting the circus on the four previous days of this week had probably spread it abroad that the wonderful Child Lion-Tamer was not on view. The audience was a much smaller one than it had been at Rothbury. Fen had seen many empty spaces, particularly in the more expensive seats in front, in that one fleeting glance she spared from the lions; but the audience produced a wonderful body of sound.

Fen began the next trick with a good heart. She lifted her whip to her shoulder, with the crisp command: "Attention!" Nimrod and Alexander came stiffly to their haunches; Roy made a half movement, then lay down again, his rather wicked eyes fixed on the little upright figure before him. Fen switched her whip menacingly through the air; she had never struck any of the lions yet, and she didn't intend to begin; but Roy must know his mistress. To let him lie there without moving was to acknowledge defeat, and, what was worse, to spoil the show before the whole audience.

"Roy, *Attention!*" she shouted.

The old lion growled horribly, then got slowly to his feet, his fangs bared in a most unpleasant

way. Fen never took her eyes off him. "*Attention!*" she repeated for the third time, and the old lion shambled sullenly into line and took his place in the rank. Fen heard a whisper pass from George to his mate: "Have the irons ready, Bill," and knew that they were seriously uneasy about Roy. Hot irons are only used to drive a wild beast back in cases of absolute necessity.

This trick, a very popular one with all audiences, consisted in making the lions obey the words of military command.

"Attention" was succeeded by "Eyes Right," "Eyes Right" by "Eyes Front," and "Eyes Front" by "Stand at Ease" and "Stand Easy." The great beasts had learned to turn their shaggy heads, to sit up stiffly, or relax at the word of command; at the "Stand at Ease" it was always part of the joke that they should roll over, and the child lion-tamer, venturing fearlessly among them, should appear to pull them into position again with a hand on their manes, as though they were so many puppies.

Nimrod and Alexander responded instantly to the touch and low-toned order, drowned in the thunder of applause from a wildly thrilled audience; but Roy snapped fiercely at her

IN THE LIONS' CAGE

been that the frantic applause, coming crashing in on the deathly silence, irritated the old lion afresh ; it may have been that as she raised her hand a few drops of blood fell on the great brute at her feet. With an awful roar that seemed to rock the cage and drown the efforts of the band, he crouched and sprang. Fen, swerving sharply, only avoided his onslaught by a hair's breadth—one of the great claws ripping the shoulder of her close-fitting coat. The band stopped with a shuddering, jangling crash—away in the audience women screamed, and Roy crouched again. And Fen knew suddenly what it was to be coldly afraid, with dry mouth and trembling knees.

She backed towards the opening in the bars, keeping her eyes fixed on the crouching lion, and conscious that Nimrod, stalking restlessly, was between her and the bars, and she ought not to trust him sufficiently to turn her back.

Someone spoke, hoarsely but commandingly. “Down, Roy !” Spoke it as the great lion sprang. She was pushed violently aside, and next moment Andrew Ferne was down on his back on the floor of the cage with the huge lion on top of him, and George was calling frantically from the opening : “Come out, Miss Fen !

FEN'S FIRST TERM

Come out, Miss Fen! They're getting irons—they'll save him yet! Come out!"

The mists cleared. Fen wasn't conscious any longer of feeling particularly afraid for herself. But she knew that her father was in the deadliest peril.

He was lying quite still, but he was conscious. Fen saw that his queer, greenish-hazel eyes were staring straight up at Roy. One of Roy's great claws was on his chest, lacerating it. Fen disregarded George's call and the opening that spelt safety behind her. The power to think and to speak, which had hitherto deserted her, seemed to have come back in this moment of supreme need.

She raised her whip and faced the huge lion undauntedly, using the familiar words of command in her firmest voice. Would the force of habit hold good, or was the innate savagery too strongly roused? Fen's eyes, steady and fearless, met the lion's bloodshot ones. Outside, the men were racing for bars to drive the great brute back. Somebody in the audience had gone for a gun—Mr. Nevill was saying something about not shooting unless it was absolutely necessary.

IN THE LIONS' CAGE

But there was nobody to do anything just at that moment except Fenella—and she did it. Slowly, before her slender upraised whip, the great brute retreated, while Andrew Ferne lay motionless, facing the horrible death he had dared for his child's sake. And by the time a handsome old man had rushed up with a gun, Roy had backed far enough for George and Bill to be able to run in the safety shutter and imprison him, and then lift the injured man out into the free air.

CHAPTER XV

AND AFTER THAT

THERE was a great crowd all round them in the ring, but Fen didn't take any notice. It was no subject of surprise to her to recognize her grandfather in the handsome old man who had managed to procure a gun, nor Aunt Frances beside him, nor even Billy and Nancy Wrotham, one on each side of a tall, soldierly-looking man whom she didn't know. All her thoughts were for her father.

"Fen?" he gasped, as they laid him down, and George, who supported him, said: "Right as rain, Mr. Ferne, sir."

Then daddy fainted, and a capable-looking young man pushed his way through the crowd and said: "Give him air," and "I'm a doctor," and somehow got everybody to stand back and sent men flying on various errands, and took no notice of Mr. Nevill's voluble explanations that no one was to blame, least of all himself.

Then Aunt Frances put an arm round Fen as she still knelt holding daddy's cold hand in

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hers. "My little girl, you must come away. They are going to move your father in an ambulance."

"Oh, let me go with him!" poor Fen urged chokily. "Daddy will want me when he comes round. Aunt Frances, don't make me come away from him again. I can't."

Lord Roswell had been conferring with the doctor. Now he patted Fen upon the shoulder very kindly.

"Be a good girl and listen to me. You can't stay with your father now, because this gentleman is going to take him to a nursing home he knows about in this place. But you and your aunt and I will go to an hotel at once, and wait in the place till you can see him again. You shan't be taken away from him till he's better, that I promise."

Fen looked up and met her grandfather's eyes. They were kind eyes, and she knew that she could trust him. She put her hand into his. "All right, grandfather, and thank you."

The men came with the ambulance. Ferne was lifted in very carefully indeed, and the doctor climbed in beside him. The ambulance moved off at a slow pace, so as not to shake the injured man. Aunt Frances took Fen's hand.

"Where are your own clothes, dear? I will come with you and help you put them on."

Mr. Nevill stood forward, bland, not bullying as he had been a little while back. Somehow he had learned the quality of Fen's relations.

"My lord, the child is bound to me by agreement, and though, of course, I shouldn't wish to stand in her light, her going will mean considerable monetary loss, and compensation——"

"What is the agreement?" asked Lord Roswell very contemptuously. "I am going to take my granddaughter away with me this instant, Mr. Nevill; but I shall be pleased to meet you and look into the matter of this precious agreement, entered into between you and a child of fourteen without her father's knowledge, in the presence of a magistrate—if you wish."

Mr. Nevill's jaw dropped. He was understood to mutter something about not troubling Lord Roswell.

"I didn't really suppose you would wish to do so," Lord Roswell informed him in a very stately manner, and Mr. Nevill, shiny top-hat and all, seemed somehow to fade away.

Fen was back in her dressing-room. Aunt Frances was tying up the scratch with her own

soft handkerchief. Fen was suddenly becoming conscious that her knees were shaking under her, and that she felt too sick and queer to answer the eager questions of Mademoiselle Mignon and Zuletta. But she roused herself sufficiently to introduce both to her beautiful aunt, and was vaguely pleased to notice how charmingly Aunt Frances received the introduction, and how they both admired her.

But the great thing was to get her clothes changed quickly, so that she could go to the nursing home with Aunt Frances and have news of daddy. She heard Mademoiselle Mignon as from a long way off.

“Yes, Miss A’Court, you take her away and keep her away. Her poor father was quite right to pack her off; don’t you let that there Nevill, with his dirty tricks, get hold of her again, though I don’t suppose there’s a decent town will have him till this scandal has died down—he knew well enough that cranky brute wasn’t safe, and it was sheer murder to send the child on with him. Ugh! You could have knocked me down with a feather” (the simile was less absurd in the case of Mademoiselle Mignon than of most people), “and if her poor papa hadn’t turned up in the nick of time——”

"We all have a great deal for which to be thankful," said Aunt Frances. "And, Mademoiselle Mignon, you may be quite certain that my little niece will never come back to the circus life again."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, though we shall all miss her dreadfully," Mademoiselle Mignon told her, and Aunt Frances smiled and said :

"Her friends must come to see her."

Fen would have been very pleased that Aunt Frances was being so delightful to the dear old friends of the old life if she hadn't been so desperately anxious about daddy.

They went outside. The bloodstained cage had been wheeled away, and Signor Orlando was performing with his horses to a considerably diminished audience. Quite a large number had gone out, unable to face any more after the horrible sight of a child in danger of her life and a man mauled by the lions. But there were people who were quite determined on their money's worth ; these stayed.

At the door leading to the dressing-room stood George.

"Got the push, Miss Fen, along of what I said to the boss, and I did give him what for,

just about," he said with relish. "So I've left the rest of 'em to carry on with them beasts, and waited here to see the last of you, and to tell you as you was a real proper heroine, and saved your dad's life, I do believe. We couldn't have done nothing with Roy in time if you hadn't been there. Give us a shake, miss, if so be as your grand relations won't think it a liberty."

"On the contrary, I want to shake hands with you myself," Lord Roswell said. "I want you to take this, my man," he put something into George's hand as he shook it warmly, "and if by the time my—my son-in-law is better, and we go home, you think you would like a job that isn't in a circus, come over to Roswell Castle, and we'll find something for you, won't we, Fenella?"

"Oh, thank you, grandfather," Fen said warmly, and then as they turned away, leaving George staring amazedly at two five-pound notes, she slid her hand into Lord Roswell's.

"I'll try not to let your name down, any more than daddy's," she whispered.

Outside the circus Billy and Nancy pounced upon her.

"Fenella, you *are!*" Billy cried. "Won't the girls just go mad!"

Lord Roswell shook hands with Colonel Wrotham.

"I suppose you've all had enough of the show—pah!" he said. "Come along to an hotel and we'll have tea together, when we've got the last news of poor Ferne. Introduce your schoolfellows, Fenella."

Fenella introduced them to her aunt and grandfather.

"Fenella must bring you home one Saturday, soon," Aunt Frances said in her sweet way. "We have plenty of room for any number of Fen's friends, and shall love to see them, shan't we, father?"

"Of course," said Lord Roswell hospitably; and Fen saw that she went up several pegs in the estimation of Nancy Wrotham. The school from which she had run away only this morning began to present distinct attractions. . . . But nothing mattered till she knew how much daddy was hurt. She just squeezed Billy's hand, and said "Thank you" fervently to Aunt Frances. Then the three of them went to the nursing home.

It was good news of daddy. One of the two

AND AFTER THAT

doctors who were looking after him came down to say so. Fen could not see him, for he was still under the anæsthetic they had given him while they examined his injuries ; but they were not so serious as had been feared. Three ribs had been crushed, and there was some laceration, but the doctors were sure that with care he would get quite well.

“ But that brute would have mauled him past saving if you hadn’t been a heroine,” said the doctor who had been at the circus.

And grandfather said : “ Yes, I’m proud of my granddaughter.”

The doctor looked at the scratch on Fen’s hand, and washed it with something that smarted horribly, but she didn’t care, in the face of that wonderful verdict. Before they left the nursing home it was settled that she might come and see daddy for just five minutes that evening, and “ in a week or two,” grandfather suggested, “ perhaps it might be possible to move him to Roswell Castle, where Fen could look after him herself when she came home for the week-ends.”

Fen could hardly believe her ears.

They went back to the hotel for a most hilarious tea, when Lord Roswell still showed himself in a most yielding mood, and seemed

to approve Billy, even though she was remarkably unlike Angela. When it was over and the two girls were going home with Colonel Wrotham, Fen drew Billy aside.

“I say, I’m sorry about running away—about doing it, I mean—not what’s happened.”

“I know,” said Billy.

“Was Miss Macdonald very mad?”

“Oh, no—just worried.”

“Could you tell her——”

“’Course.”

“I won’t play the goat when I come back.”

“She’ll be all right, and everything ’ll be all right—you’ll see,” prophesied the optimistic Billy. “And shan’t I enjoy seeing Angela’s face when I tell her what you did, and the first-class special out-size in heros and heroines you and your father are.”

“Oh, stop it!” shouted Fen.

CHAPTER XVI

ENTIRELY UNEXPECTED

IT was Sunday. It was the Sunday only one week after that eventful day when Fenella rode her grandfather's mare across the park to say good-bye to the circus.

Now she had said a much more complete good-bye, she thought to herself, as she stood at the door of the nursing home waiting for Aunt Frances to call for her on her way from church; she knew that she would never go back to the old life again. To tell the truth, she did not wish to do so; that stolen peep at it had been an eye-opener, even if daddy had not this very evening told her the great news that grandfather was going to find something better than circus work for him to do when he got well again, something that would not take him far away from Fen.

"He is a trump," Andrew Ferne said in his weak, tired voice, "and I wish I'd known the decent sort he is ever so long ago."

And then daddy's nurse came to say the

doctor had arrived to dress his wounds a little earlier than was expected, and would Fen go and wait for her aunt downstairs. It was a quarter to eight—she would soon be here.

Fen got up obediently, and kissed her father. She was sorry to be obliged to go ten minutes sooner than she had expected, but doctors mustn't be kept waiting, and she would see him again to-morrow.

“Good night, daddy. Sleep well.”

“Your aunt is taking you home, isn't she?” Andrew asked a little anxiously, holding her hand.

“Yes, daddy, and she'll be out of church directly,” Fen said cheerfully. “I expect I shall see her coming down the street from the church if I open the door.”

“Good night, then, old lady,” father said, and nurse bustled her out. She met the doctor on the stairs, and he stopped to shake hands, and ask her chaffingly if she had gone in for any more adventures.

“My next will be going back to school,” Fen assured him, and that was what she really thought, since it is not given to anybody to see what lies round the next sharp turn in the road before them.

She passed on and opened the hall door. It was a wet night, and the street lamps were blurred, and the rather empty pavements were shining with the damp; but there was no sign of Aunt Frances. Fen was just going to shut the door again and sit down by the drawing-room fire to wait for her aunt to appear, when she caught sight of a familiar face in one of the few passers-by—a square, freckled face with honest eyes, under the brim of a very old and shabby cap. It was the boy for whose sake she had faced Mr. Nevill in the first instance, the boy who had so longed to see the circus, and who had no money for amusements because he was the bread-winner at home.

She darted down the steps of the nursing home and caught him by the arm.

“Did you like it, boy?”

The boy stared, then a smile of recognition dawned upon his face.

“Like it? Didn’t I, jest! Leastways, till that great brute turned on you, miss, and the gent what coughed. . . . A sport, ’e was, and you, miss—you was a fair treat.”

“It was a pity about Roy,” Fen said regretfully. “You didn’t see the show as it should have been. Still, I’m——”

A man coming along the wet street caught her voice, and turned round. "It's you, child, by all that's wonderful! How's your father?"

"Better," Fen said stiffly. She hadn't forgiven Mr. Nevill for his cruelty to daddy.

"Well, I *am* glad of that," Mr. Nevill said. He seemed extraordinarily subdued and down on his luck, Fen saw. The boy went on, seeing her accosted by someone so smart-looking as Mr. Nevill, and Fen and her late employer were left standing together in an empty street.

"Can't you tell me a bit more about him?" Mr. Nevill asked. "I've been through a pretty bad time these last two days, I can tell you, wondering how it was with the poor chap, and feeling myself half responsible for what took place."

It was Fenella's feeling that in taking to himself only half the responsibility Mr. Nevill was unnecessarily modest, but she didn't say so. He was certainly very down to-night; even his hat seemed less shiny than usual.

"Daddy is really getting on," she told him. "The wounds aren't hurting him so much, and the doctor says when the ribs set——"

Mr. Nevill drew her gently in at an open doorway through which he had come.

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“Finish telling me inside here—it’s too wet for you in the street, my dear,” he said. “It is luck meeting you like this; I’ve been fretting my heart out for news, and didn’t even know where they’d taken your poor father so I could inquire.”

Fen didn’t want to go anywhere with Mr. Nevill, but it seemed unkind and revengeful not to reassure him about daddy. Probably he was very sorry by now for having been so horrible.

He brought her into a little empty room that smelt musty. There was a jug of coffee on the table that didn’t smell like the coffee served at grandfather’s hotel, and two cups with chipped rims.

“Seems odd to see *you* drinking coffee, boss,” Fen said, speaking her thoughts aloud.

Mr. Nevill sighed. “I’ve a perfect brute of a head on me, and thought maybe coffee would clear it. I’ve a journey before me, too.”

“Where are you going?”

“America—there’s a post offered me there a while back—not what I’ve a right to expect, but better than nothing. The circus is broken up. I’ve been in no end of trouble over those dratted lions, and the long and short of it is

that I can't carry on, and I'm off to Liverpool in twenty minutes."

"The circus broken up? I *am* sorry; and what's going to happen to everybody?" Fen asked breathlessly.

"Sit down and have a cup of coffee with me and I'll tell you," Mr. Nevill said. "There's two friends of yours I'm expecting round to say 'good-bye'—Mademoiselle Mignon and Zuletta. Have a cup, my dear?"

"I mustn't stay. Aunt Frances will have come from church," Fen said, but she did want to see Mademoiselle Mignon and Zuletta and hear their plans; Aunt Frances would forgive her two minutes' lateness when she heard the reason.

She didn't want the coffee, but it seemed ungrateful to refuse it when Mr. Nevill had poured it out for her with such care, even carrying the cup to the sideboard to add sugar, as there was none on the table.

She drank a little, and thought it rather nasty, with a queer taste. And the closeness of the stale, little, airless room was beginning to affect her head—there were always open windows where Aunt Frances stayed. She heard Mr. Nevill as from a long way off.

"Orlando is going with me to America—

smart chap, Orlando—but it will mean starting way down the ladder instead of being proprietor. Drink up your coffee, child—don't you like it ? ”

“ I'm not thirsty, thanks,” Fenella said politely, wondering why Mr. Nevill's fur-collared overcoat hanging over the back of a chair should seem to come alternately very near and then go far away, as though it were endowed with actual life.

“ I dare say what I can offer you, now I'm down on my luck like this, isn't what you're used to, now, with all your grand relations,” Mr. Nevill said reproachfully, and his tone spurred Fen to effort. She gulped down the greater part of the cup's contents, and felt the room reel round with her.

She felt oddly powerless. She was just conscious that Mr. Nevill held her head back and poured the rest of the coffee down her throat, spilling some of it on the front of her coat. It smelt strangely of spirit. She wanted to remonstrate—to say that she must go, as Aunt Frances would be waiting, but she seemed to be someone not herself, who was sitting in a chair in a room that reeled round.

She was only vaguely conscious that the door had opened and somebody had come in, to

whom Mr. Nevill was speaking. She heard his coarse voice in accents of intense self-congratulation.

“ Yes. The stuff in the coffee did it, and as easy as winking. She won't know anything for hours, and she's coming to America with us.”

Then the room stopped reeling, and Mr. Nevill's great overcoat got up of itself, apparently, and wrapped her round. She fell through darkness.

Twelve and a half minutes later, Aunt Frances, arriving at the nursing home and, asking for Fenella, heard the distant screech of the whistle as the Liverpool express left Sheringham.

CHAPTER XVII

KIDNAPPED

FEN woke to consciousness that wasn't clear, and wondered vaguely and in a detached manner where she could be.

Everything moved oddly about her, a ceiling with a light in it seemed to come down extraordinarily near to her head, the air was close and heavy, and she had a most terrific headache. She closed her eyes wearily again and tried to sleep. Something had happened; it was too tiring to try and disentangle her mind and find out what it was. . . .

Somebody groaned just below her. . . . How odd to have anybody just below! The groans were repeated, and a baby child cried. Fen had to open her heavy eyes and move her aching head, then—she must see what was wrong. Perhaps the clown's wife's baby had croup; it often had croup—only, why was it in bed below her? Why was she lying, fully dressed, on a shelf that had a little parapet?

Fen wrenched herself back into some sort

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of consciousness with a tremendous effort, and spoke weakly and uncertainly.

“What’s the matter?”

A woman craned her head out from another shelf below. “Nothing’s the matter, dearie, but what we’ve all got to put up with when we’re crossing, steerage, to America.”

That woke Fenella quite effectually. “*What!* America?”

“Yes, my dear—there, don’t you make a fuss about it now, or what will you do when it gets rough? We’re not clear of the Mersey yet.”

Fen sat as upright as the low bulging ceiling would let her, and pressed both her hands to her throbbing head.

“Going to America.” It was to America that Mr. Nevill had been going. She had been talking to him in a long-past time, in a close little room, and he had given her coffee that smelt of something else. Fen knew now—she had been drugged with some form of spirit in the coffee—she remembered the visit to the side-board—and Mr. Nevill had kidnapped her, and he and Signor Orlando were carrying her off to America, probably to make her a draw in some circus over there, where nobody would find her.

But what was it the kindly woman had said ? “Not clear of the Mersey.” Then she wasn’t very far upon her voyage yet, and . . . Fen swung her legs over the side of the berth, wishing that she didn’t feel so miserably sick, and dizzy, and heavy.

“Keep still, my dear ; she’s pitching a bit—you’ll be bad if you walk about,” advised the poor woman, but Fen didn’t heed her. For a loud, piercing siren screech had rent the air, and the woman murmured resignedly : “That’s the tug going back with the last letters.”

The tug going ashore ! Fen didn’t take in the meaning of the words at first, she was so dazed and confused. Then some vague idea filtered through into her mind. The tug—that went ashore with the last letters ; it was the last link with home, and when people said good-bye to it they said good-bye to home and faced the outward voyage.

There was a ladder running up to the end of her berth. Without troubling about the fact that she was coatless, hatless and shoeless, Fen scrambled down it, dizzily, and reeled towards the cabin door.

Through all the muddle and confusion in her mind she had realized that she was in a very

tight corner. She was on her way to America, in the hands of two utterly unscrupulous men, and not one of her own relations or friends knew what had become of her.

She swung against the door.

"Here, Bridget, you stop that there little gell!" shrieked her kindly fellow-passenger. "She don't know what she's doing, pore lamb!"

Bridget, a huge Irishwoman, who was sitting on the lowest berth beside the door, her untidy head bowed on her hands, looked up apathetically. Poor soul, she had only just said good-bye to her only boy, and was going out to take a cook's place at a big New York hotel.

"Here, don't you go after trying to get out, honey," she said, catching at Fen's arm and holding her fast. "Don't I know the cruel feeling of it—that one would give anything in the world for a last look at the ould land—but you're better down here."

"Let me go!" poor Fen panted. She had been trying to break in upon the Irishwoman's soft tones all the time. "You must let me go. I oughtn't to be here. I've been kidnapped!"

Those of the passengers in the stuffy cabin who were not already too sick to raise their

heads sat up to stare at the child who made this surprising announcement, and Bridget released her hold.

“The saints preserve us! What is it you’re saying at all?”

Fen did not wait to answer, there was no time. She opened the door; she dashed up the swaying “companion” with an ease which was almost as astonishing to the cabin-full as her announcement about the kidnapping had been. At the top of the ladder a burly sailor barred her way.

“No steerage passengers on deck to-night, missy, by the captain’s orders,” he said officiously. Then humanly and kindly, as Fen tried desperately to push past him: “No, my dear, you stay below and go to bed. It’s settling in for a dirty night—and——”

Fen dared not wait to explain about the kidnapping, but was under his outstretched arm before he expected her. She was past him; she was on deck at last—a deck of sorts.

But the deck of a big steamer is not a simple, straightforward sort of place, especially when approached from a steerage cabin. Fen felt perfectly bewildered among a maze of narrow steps and doors and ladders: which would lead

her quickest to a deck from which she could see the whereabouts of her last hope—the tug ?

To add to her confusion it was dark, and down on the lower decks the rolling of the boat was distinctly felt.

Fen was dizzy and confused, and did not know which way to turn, but she did not lose her courage. She made a determined bolt for the nearest stairway.

She heard her sailor in pursuit, and the sound lent her wings. She outdistanced him. They had always said in the circus that no one could run or jump like Fenella Ferne. She gained a deck from which she could see what was happening, and she saw two things :

One, that the tug was already backing fussily away from the big steamer ; the other, that standing together, looking over the ship's side, were Signor Orlando and the boss !

CHAPTER XVIII

MIKE TO THE RESCUE

ON that eventful Sunday evening it so happened that the sermon at the church to which Aunt Frances had gone was some ten minutes longer than usual.

Not that Aunt Frances noticed that fact till she came out from the deep church porch into the lighted street and saw a clock. "Fen will wonder what has become of me," she said half aloud, and hurried. Aunt Frances and her newly found niece were firm friends.

She noticed, in the rather vague way that one does notice outside things when thinking about something else, that a freckle-faced boy, with rather an anxious expression on a face that looked as though it were meant to be particularly jolly and cheerful, was walking up and down outside a public-house on the other side of the street. There was a light over the doorway, and it fell full upon that waiting figure. Frances carried the impression with her right into the hall of the nursing home.

Then, to her surprise, she found that Fenella was not waiting for her there. Frances had rather expected that she would be. The doctor's evening visit was generally paid before this. Then she caught sight of the doctor's hat and stick on the hall table, and thought it odder still that Fen should be upstairs.

Perhaps Sister had called the child into her little sitting-room. Frances tapped at the door, but there was no answer. She opened the door, but there was no one there. Where could Fen be? Frances went upstairs, and met the doctor coming out of Andrew Ferne's room.

"Ah, Miss A'Court, good evening," he said. "Coming in for a little chat with my patient? He is quite up to it to-night."

"No, I really came to fetch my little niece," Frances said. "She is with her father, I suppose? Did you call her up?"

"She went downstairs as I arrived, to wait for you," the doctor said.

But Fenella was not in the hall, and it appeared that no one had seen her since she passed the doctor, excepting a nurse who had noticed her standing at the open door, as though looking for her aunt. But the nurse had just been hurrying through with hot water for a

patient, and hadn't given the matter any thought.

"She must have gone out to meet me," Frances said. "But how odd that I shouldn't have seen her!"

She ran out into the street. It was almost empty; the churchgoers had all disappeared into their homes, but the boy with the freckled face was walking up and down restlessly outside the public-house.

Frances stopped and spoke to him. "Did you by any chance see a little girl, with dark bobbed hair and dressed in a grey overcoat with a fur collar, coming down the street a little while ago?"

"Do you mean her as is the child lion-tamer, and saved her father from an 'orrible death last week?" the boy said. "Yes, miss, I see 'er and spoke to 'er, but there's someone else a-doin' of that now."

When one is afraid already, it takes very little to bring fear's loping footsteps abreast. Frances knew then that she was afraid for Fenella.

"Who is speaking to her now? Where is she?" She heard her own voice ask the questions quietly, but she was afraid.

"She's gone in there," the boy said, pointing to the passage and the side door. "She's been there 'alf an hour, I dare say. She's along of a gent wot I can't quite place—seen 'im before, I think, but different rig out. I'm waitin' 'ere to finish sayin' thank you for 'er kindness in lettin' of me in free to the show. The gent interrupted and a-carried of 'er off—very eager to 'ear about Mr. Ferne, 'e was."

"In there?" Frances said, looking distastefully at the door of the public-house. "She shouldn't be in there. I will go and fetch her at once."

She was relieved. Of course a public-house was not the sort of place for Fen, but probably the child had run across some friend from the old life who wanted news of Andrew Ferne, and the child had been used to rough places. But she came back in five minutes with a very anxious look upon her face. The proprietor of the public-house had seen nothing whatever of a little girl. They didn't serve children, and would certainly have noticed if one had come in. Sorry he couldn't help the lady.

But Mike had remembered something by the time poor Frances had come back to him.

"I know the gent, 'oo 'e was; it's jest

MIKE TO THE RESCUE

come to me," he proclaimed. "The boss of that there circus—Mr. Nevill, that's 'im!"

"Are you sure?" Frances only waited for Mike's nod and darted back into the public-house. "Can I see Mr. Nevill? He is staying with you?"

The proprietor of the public-house was not pleased to see Miss A'Court back. He took it as a personal injury that anybody should come worrying him on a day when they were not open for the sale of drink. It could be nothing to do with this smart lady who did or did not have meals in their little back room. No, he knew nothing about a Mr. Nevill. And madam would excuse, they wanted to shut up for the night!

Frances was baffled for the moment, but she was not defeated.

"Boy, what is your name? . . . Oh, Mike, watch the place; let me know if you see anyone come out," she whispered, and ran across the street and back to the nursing home.

The sister-in-charge met her with a grave face. "Can you go up to Mr. Ferne? He has heard that the child is missing; he is very agitated."

"Please 'phone to Lord Roswell, then, asking him to come to me at once, and to the police-

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station," Frances said, and hurried upstairs to Fenella's father. She knew from her tone that the sister was anxious about him.

"Miss A'Court, Nevill's got her. Go after him somebody," he panted. "She's a big asset, you know, and he's stolen her—I'm sure of it. Put the police on. . . . I can't get Sister to see that anything matters except my confounded temperature, but you know . . . get the police!"

"Lie down," Frances said gently. "We are not wasting any time, I promise. Tell me where this man would be likely to go if he has stolen Fenella."

"America," Ferne said promptly. "He'll have to lie low in this country for a bit. . . . Set the police on to him quick, or I'll get up and do it myself. . . . My little girl!"

Lord Roswell and two stalwart policemen were in the hall as Frances came downstairs, after calling the nurse-in-charge to go to Ferne's room. In three sentences she told what she knew, and what Ferne feared. In three minutes the party were at the public-house, where Mike still waited—a faithful sentinel.

"No one's come out," he whispered, and Lord Roswell slipped something into the boy's hand.

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The proprietor of the public-house was a good deal more civil to the police than he had been to Frances A'Court. A gentleman answering to Mr. Nevill's description had certainly had dinner there, he acknowledged, and had ordered coffee three-quarters of an hour ago, to take, he had said, before starting on a journey. He had expected a friend or friends to meet him, but had said nothing about a little girl. Here was the room where the coffee had been served—cups not cleared away yet, being Sunday night and all.

Lord Roswell, the police and Frances pressed into the little close room, into which Fenella had been decoyed. As the proprietor had said, the cups were still on the table. The senior policeman took them up and smelt them one after the other.

"Mr. Nevill or one of his friends liked his coffee well laced," he remarked.

"Could the wretch have drugged the child?" Frances exclaimed, with eyes of horror. "But Fen is so determined, she would never take drugged stuff."

"She might be forced to," said Lord Roswell grimly; then to the proprietor: "See here, my man. My granddaughter came in here and she

hasn't come out. Either she is hidden in the house—or there is another way out of it. Which is it ? ”

The proprietor was frightened. The proprietor was, therefore, apologetic.

The gentleman was welcome to search the house, but Mr. Nevill had gone long ago—out of the back door he must have gone, for he remembered hearing someone stumble against the dustbin, and it was overturned when he went out a bit later. Search the place and welcome, but Mr. Nevill had gone off, he could take his oath of that. Where, he couldn't tell, Mr. Nevill not being one to say much except that he was off on a journey.

They tried the station. There had been two train departures in the last half-hour : one a slow local, the other an express to Liverpool. A porter, rather gloomy at being called up just when he thought his unwelcome Sunday duty finished with, was not able to supply any information. He “ hadn't noticed any of the passengers partikerler ; they was mostly men by either train.” There was no help to be found at the booking office, as the place was shut and the booking clerk gone home for the night.

“ And yet Mike was quite certain that

MIKE TO THE RESCUE

Nevill was with the child," Frances said despairingly.

And Mike, who had followed with the rest, nodded and said: "Yes, certain."

"Well, well, all this talk of the journey may have been a blind, don't you think so, constable?" Lord Roswell said. "And as to Ferne's fear of America, it's a bit absurd on the face of it. People don't melt off to America without preparation; even if the fellow meant to go himself he couldn't know he was going to meet the child. We'll telegraph to Liverpool and the terminus of this other train, though it's confoundedly awkward—Sunday night and all. Still, I suppose you police can help us there; give a description of the child and say she's been kidnapped. She'll be ready enough to help herself, if I know anything of my grand daughter . . ."

One of the police had been busy with a timetable. "We shall have to look sharp, my lord. The Liverpool train's been gone three-quarters of an hour, and it's only an hour's run. I had better get through to the station-master on the 'phone and see if he can stop the young lady at the barrier. Could you set down her description, madam, while I'm getting through?"

But by the time the police could get through, both the Liverpool and local trains had reached their termini and discharged their passengers, and everyone was quite at sea again as to how to trace the missing child.

"Put the matter into the hands of Scotland Yard," directed Lord Roswell. "No expense is to be spared. Don't let there be a moment wasted."

Frances touched his arm. "Father, couldn't we take the car and drive to Liverpool? I feel as if—— And remember what her father thought about America."

"It's all nonsense, you know. There isn't likely to be a boat starting to-night at all events, and Scotland Yard will know how to set about it all; and it is the veriest guess that he has taken her to Liverpool," said Lord Roswell, but he did not say "No."

And a quarter of an hour later Lord Roswell's car slid swiftly and smoothly away from the door of the hotel, well stored with petrol for the fifty-mile run to Liverpool.



"Fen landed in the exact middle of the coil, a little shaken, but unhurt."

CHAPTER XIX

FEN COMES BACK

FEN saw the two men nearly a quarter of a minute before they saw her. She might have escaped them altogether if her pursuing sailor, zealous for the captain's orders concerning steerage passengers, had not shouted. Then they turned and recognized her.

But that short quarter of a minute had given Fen time to take her bearings. There was a clear space just beyond them at the ship's side. She landed on it neatly and easily as a cat, sighted a great coil of rope on the tug's deck and jumped for it, as she had jumped many a time, for waving hoop or swinging trapeze, just to show Zuletta how easy it was. She landed in the exact middle of the coil, a little shaken, but unhurt, while everybody on steamer and tug united in shouting things at her.

She gathered her breath and spoke as two or three horrified sailors, headed by a red-faced, grey-whiskered old man, hurried up to her, and the old man felt her anxiously for broken bones,

"It's all right. I had to jump. I'm being kidnapped."

"The child is mine," bellowed Mr. Nevill from the steamer. "She's running away."

The old man looked with his kindly blue eyes from Fenella to the slowly widening gulf across which she had come.

"You must have had powerful strong reasons to get away if you went to jump that, a mite like you! But we aren't authorized to take passengers back, my dear."

Fen chuckled. "You don't have much choice, do you, about me? The steamer won't stop, will it, for all Mr. Nevill says? And you wouldn't drop me into the sea, I suppose. Besides, I was really being kidnapped, and I couldn't be expected to put up with that."

"Well, if I know old Captain Baines, he won't stop his engines because a steerage passenger-child chooses to go home by the tug. He knows me, and he knows I'd look after any child thrown on my hands. But he'll have to explain why you did it, and I don't altogether envy him the job."

"I'll tell you," Fen said.

With the tugmaster's coat round her she sat enthroned on the coil of rope, and sailed back up

the Mersey, telling what had happened, or, at least, what she knew of it. The tugmaster supplied the fact that she had probably been drugged heavily with spirit and taken aboard too confused to know what was happening.

The good old man waxed quite bloodthirsty over her wrongs, and insisted that she must be taken to the chief of the Liverpool police, Sunday night though it was, and get a wireless sent after Mr. Nevill so that he should find himself looked out for when he entered New York Harbour. "A bit of supper first with mother" came into the programme, however, and the loan of Ruby's coat, hat and shoes (Ruby being apparently his youngest child, and "near about Fen's size"). It was rather a relief to hear that this would come first.

"But I should like to telegraph to Aunt Frances first of all, if you can on a Sunday," she said. "If you'll lend me the money she'll pay you back all right, and I think she'll be rather frightened about me. You see, no one except Mike had any idea where I was."

"We'll see to all that," said the tugmaster cheerfully. "You leave it all to me. It's bed for you first, while I send off your wire, and then

into Ruby's clothes and off to give evidence first thing in the morning."

He took Fen's hand and led her away from the harbour through some narrow streets and across a wider one, poor Fen so drooping with weariness that she could hardly see where she was going. There were no taxis about at this hour on a Sunday night, so it was not surprising that the tugmaster turned his grey head and looked with some interest at a handsome car which was coming rapidly down the empty street. But Fen was too worn out to look or to care; indeed, she had to be pulled back, as in her stumbling progress she had almost lurched into the car.

The chauffeur pulled up; a lady leaned out.

"I am so sorry, did we frighten—— Why, Fen! My little Fen!"

Fen woke up. Afterwards she thought it was odd that she wasn't more surprised at seeing Aunt Frances there in Liverpool. As it was, everything had been so extraordinary ever since her waking in that steerage cabin that nothing had the power to surprise her very much. "Aunt Frances," she said uncertainly; then she found herself being held in her aunt's arms as though Frances would never let her go, and, what was

more extraordinary, being kissed in the middle of the street by grandfather, who wasn't given to kissing at any time, and particularly objected to demonstrations in public.

Then somehow explanations were given, a confused whirl it sounded in her tired ears, and Lord Roswell was shaking hands with the tug-master and thanking him in a voice that sounded quite shaky, and Aunt Frances was almost lifting her into the car, big girl though she was. And something was being said about letting father know, but grandfather must have seen to all that, for Aunt Frances swept Fen away without much volition of her own into an hotel bed, where she slept the clock round and a little over.

It is doubtful how long Fen might not have slept next morning if Aunt Frances had not been obliged to rouse her in order that she might answer the questions of the superintendent of police, who came round to the hotel on purpose to ask her about Mr. Nevill and his behaviour.

He was so kind and nice that Fen did not dislike answering his questions in the least, and at the end of the interview he assured her that a wireless message would catch the steamer in mid-ocean, and that Mr. Nevill would not find

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himself allowed to land at New York, or to kidnap people again for a long time.

Fen was very much relieved to hear this, and distinctly pleased by his congratulations on her courage, but it was most pleasant of all to be sitting between grandfather and Aunt Frances, and to have them looking at her as though they felt her their own, and someone of whom they were proud. Fen felt then that she had really and truly come back, and to her own people.

CHAPTER XX

“THE DEM”

IT was a great day at Cliff Dene School, for it was the day of the annual display of dancing and gymnastics, known familiarly to Cliff Dene girls as “The Dem.” It was a day always greatly looked forward to at the school, and now to add to all its other excitements it was the day when the competition would take place for Colonel Templeton’s prize, for which special practices had been going on during the whole term.

The afternoon had come, and the whole school was in a state of thrill, from the small juniors, who were to open the performance with the “doll dance,” the “nursery rhyme dance,” and the “dream dance,” to the senior class which competed for the prize in classical dancing, and which was naturally expected to stand the best chance of holding among its numbers the lucky winner of Colonel Templeton’s splendid prize—five pounds’ worth of books.

Fen, of course, stood no chance yet with

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dancing, either in a junior or senior class ; but Miss Wingate, the gymnastic mistress, after a trial of her powers on the day of her return to school, put her forthwith into the competition class, where she received a welcome, even from Angela.

She took to school gymnastics like a duck to water, and found that there was a great deal she could learn, despite the circus training. And she found the other girls of the class as eager to help her learn as Miss Wingate herself was. This coming back to school was all extraordinarily different from that first arrival there, when she had been a very new girl, pushed into a very new life, and with a sense of injustice about the whole business, mingled with the sore, angry sense of being an outsider.

It was all so very different this time. She found herself looking upon Cliff Dene House as quite an old friend ; it was difficult to believe that she could have been in such a hurry to get away from it, even if Miss Macdonald had punished her, and Angela been unfair. Neither had been such great grievances after all ; and Cliff Dene House had such a wonderfully welcoming look when she came back to it again, and Miss Macdonald was so kind and nice, and the girls

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so vociferously pleased to see her and so eager to hear every detail of her adventures, that not all her ignorance of lessons could make her feel an outsider in the world of school any more. The rest of the term went extraordinarily fast.

Billy got her into the second net-ball team, and taught her to play tennis on the hard court, so that she might not be out of it next summer when the Tournament came on; Fen found herself looking forward quite keenly to next term and its doings. Colonel Templeton had offered the school the use of a bathing pool near his boat-house three times a week, and Billy had promised to teach Fen to swim.

Even the sharing of a room with Angela had ceased to be the trial it had been at first. Angela had apologized for her share in Fen's running away the moment she came back, and with a thoroughness of which Fen would never have believed her cousin capable. In fact Fen found it most embarrassing, and interrupted it as soon as possible. It would be inaccurate to say that she and Angela became great friends directly this had happened, but Angela was certainly much less aggressive when reminding Fen of rules and regulations.

Fen was thinking a good deal of Angela, as

she dressed for "The Dem" on that glorious spring afternoon, the last of her first term at school. Angela had certainly been decent to her lately and it must have been very trying—Fen could see that now—to have a new cousin, brought up in a circus, sprung upon you, even without the added trial of seeing the new cousin beat you at "your special stunt." She knew by this time that though Angela might beat her at a demonstration requiring most especially memory or grace, she was Angela's superior if it came to balance and lightness, and those two factors were so very likely to count more in the tests that would be chosen for Colonel Templeton's prize.

Fen thought of what Miss Macdonald had said to her three months ago about her cousin Angela; here was perhaps her chance of being really generous to her. Angela did want to win the special gym prize very much indeed; Fen knew that, even though Angela said hardly anything about it; and she would have stood a far better chance of doing so if Fen had never come to Cliff Dene House. It did not occur to Fenella that in that case there would have been no Colonel Templeton prize, because little Hazel would never have been rescued from the

weir. She was making up her mind to a sacrifice, and speeded up her dressing. As usual, she had dashed upstairs to dress a good ten minutes after Angela. Angela was nearly ready.

"I say, any chance of my seeing Miss Macdonald before the show starts?" Fen asked anxiously.

"Miss Macdonald! 'The Dem' Day! My dear Fenella!"

"It's important."

"Well, I don't know," Angela said slowly. "She won't much want to be bothered. Are you very keen?"

"Keen? I don't know quite; yes, I suppose I am."

"You will have to make haste over your dressing, then," Angela mentioned, with a slight return of the old superior manner. She tied the ribbon at the end of her plait into a bow of unrivalled neatness. "Miss Macdonald might see you, but there won't be much time to spare. People arrive so punctually for 'The Dem.'"

Angela put her shoes straight, and departed, without another word. She appeared to be in a most unusual hurry for Angela, the girl who had never been known to run things fine. The

superior tone and the unsympathetic hurry rankled just a little. "She might just have offered to help me," Fen said to herself, wrestling with a new frock that had clips in unexpected places. "She's all right; *she* doesn't want to see Miss Macdonald before those bothering punctual visitors turn up."

But it seemed that Fen was wrong in that idea. As she arrived, breathless, at Miss Macdonald's study five minutes later, Angela was emerging from it, her fair face rather flushed.

Fen shot a puzzled glance at her, but couldn't even wait to wonder what had brought her there. "Please, Miss Macdonald, can I come in? Can you spare me just one minute?" she jerked out.

"Two, but no more, Fenella," the Head Mistress said.

Fen shut the door behind her very carefully.

"Please, Miss Macdonald, I hope you won't mind, but I should like to scratch for the gymnastic competition," she blurted out.

"You want to scratch for the competition at the last moment?"

"Yes, please, I do."

"Why, Fenella?"

"Oh, I'd rather."

“Have you no reason to give me for this rather startling request, Fenella?”

“Sorry, I can’t give you the reason, Miss Macdonald.”

“Perhaps I can,” suggested Miss Macdonald, very quietly. “You would like to give your cousin Angela a better chance of winning Colonel Templeton’s prize?”

Fen became fiery red. “How did you know? I dare say she will, anyway.”

“But you want to make sure? I think I understand. Well, Fenella, I am afraid I cannot allow you to upset all arrangements by retiring, even for the best of motives; but it is not at all certain that you and Angela will find yourselves competing against each other. Ways of managing a thing are often found, when two people wish it enough. So go away, and do your very best this afternoon, and feel quite happy about Angela.”

Fen had to go, without waiting for the questions she was dying to ask, for there was the sound of the first car arriving, and Miss Macdonald had to go and receive her guests. But she was thoroughly puzzled by Miss Macdonald’s remark “When *two* people want a thing.” Who in the world could the other be? Surely not

Angela? Of course, Angela had been coming away from Miss Macdonald's study, but it couldn't be Angela who was the other person; at least, Fen could see no reason why it should be.

She would have wondered a good deal more over that extraordinary remark, if it were not that the guests were arriving so very fast. She had only just arrived in the gym when Miss Wingate blew her whistle and gave the order to line up for the march past with which "The Dem" began, and everybody had to find her place at top speed, in the big room adjoining the gymnasium itself. Fen, being so much shorter than Angela, stood nowhere near her, and so had no opportunity of asking whether her cousin could find an answer to the riddle which so perplexed her.

They heard the visitors go trooping up to the platform at one end of the gym, and then Miss Wingate went in to ask Miss Macdonald whether she were ready, and immediately on her return the inspiring strains of the march struck up on the gymnasium piano, and Miss Wingate spoke crisply. "Ready, girls? Forward! *March!*"

With the seniors leading, row followed row

"THE DEM"

of the waiting girls, swinging smartly through the open door into the gym. Their gym tunics were all of exactly the correct shortness, their white silk blouses were spotless, no one had the seam of a stocking crooked by so much as a hair's breadth; for the honour of the school was at stake when Cliff Dene House held it's "Dem."

Vigorous clapping greeted the perfect marching of the sixty-three girls, as they circled the great room twice; once in ordinary step, then at the double, returning to the steady swing of the marching step again for leaving the gym. No one was out of time in the very smallest degree, and Miss Wingate, though hot and harassed, was looking quite distinctly pleased when the girls halted in the outer room. "The Dem" had started well.

"Topping audience—your people were there all right, weren't they?" Billy whispered to Fen. The girls were not supposed to talk in the ante-room, for fear of distracting the gym mistress, or being heard in the gymnasium. The door of communication between ante-room and gym naturally stood wide open while "The Dem" was in progress.

Something can be seen with the tail of one's eye, even when the eyes are very much "Eyes

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Front " at a " Dem," and Fen was able to assure Billy, with pride, that Aunt Frances and Aunt Rosalind were very much there, and "clapping like anything."

Unfortunately, Billy wanted to know at once whether Fen had seen her people, "Daddy and Mother and Chrystobel," and Billy's whisper when she was excited was a more penetrating one than Fen's. Billy had never been obliged, like Fen, to talk without drawing upon herself the undesired attention of the boss. "Silence, girls!" ordered Miss Wingate. "Wilhelmina! Fenella! What are you whispering about? Be quiet, please, and attend."

And so Fen was deprived of the opportunity of asking her staunch friend's opinion as to what Miss Macdonald could have meant.

Miss Wingate had the programme—a programme whose typewritten neatness was marred by two or three alterations in ink—held in her hand, and was consulting it as though she were not quite sure of the order of the proceedings.

"Class I, ready for the 'doll dance'? Form up, children! Have you each got your doll or Teddy? That's right. Phyllis, pull up your socks! Bobby, your shoe is unbuttoned! Christine and Peggy, what have you been doing to

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your hair ribbons—they're all anyhow? Tie them properly, please, one of you seniors! Now, girls, all of you listen very carefully. Miss Macdonald has made one or two alterations in our programme. . . . No, Olga, you can't change Teddys with Mary Ross; please behave, children, or I shall be really angry. Bunny! Betty! What are you doing? Your places are *not* next to each other. No, you can't change them—go back at once; don't let me have to speak to you again! . . . To go back to the alterations in the programme—there's the 'doll dance' music starting! Ready, Class I? Now don't get excited. Six bars before you start. . . . Steady, and don't hurry the time. Joanie, you lead. Off you go! . . . Now, girls, about these alterations!"

It is not easy to give out notices at the same time as you are watching a baby class, which occasionally allows private feuds to interfere with previous instructions, and at the same time seeing that the competitors for the next item on the programme are in readiness.

It was not altogether surprising that Miss Wingate, who was conducting her first "Dem" and was a little unhinged in consequence, should have failed to get those notices read out until

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the programme was well upon its way ; in point of fact, not till the interval between Parts I and II. Then it appeared to Fenella that there was at least one alteration which was very important indeed ; and she began to have an inkling of Miss Macdonald's meaning in those cryptic remarks made just before "The Dem."

Colonel Templeton's prize was to be divided, and the competitions for the two parts were not only completely different in themselves, but possessed an entirely different list of competitors. Miss Wingate read the names aloud to the eagerly listening girls, and Fenella Ferne and Angela A'Court were on different lists !

Half an hour later a thrilled audience was watching breathlessly while Angela triumphantly out-distanced all competitors in her section. Three-quarters of an hour later they saw the same thing happen in the other section with Fenella, who finished with balance, walking and ball-throwing on the bar, at a height of ten feet.

They were to go up together for Colonel Templeton's prize, amid scenes of unexampled enthusiasm. Just in that moment when everybody, girls and audience alike, were clapping, and before Miss Macdonald could insist on silence enough to make her voice heard to call

the winners to the dais, a very odd thing happened. The two prize-winners, standing side by side, looked at each other at the same moment, and said the same thing at exactly the same instant.

"I'm glad it was you!"

Then they both laughed. Fen said: "How silly that sounds! But I really wanted you to win, Angela."

"I wanted you to win, Fenella!"

Enlightenment came. "Did Miss Macdonald——" Fen blurted out, above the noise of clapping, which seemed to shut them away from other people and make them wonderfully private for the moment. "Did you try to scratch for me?"

"Yes, I did," Angela confessed. "I went and asked Miss Macdonald if I might scratch, so that you should be quite sure of winning. She wouldn't let me, but she said it would be all right, I should find, and I think she understood."

"Why did you want me to win the prize?" Fen asked curiously.

"Oh, I don't know exactly, but I did. I have been rather horrid to you, I know, Fenella; but I don't mean to be any more, you see."

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“ You were all right ; most of the bother was my fault,” Fen said. “ But if you mean that you don’t mind me any more, in spite of the circus and everything, let’s be friends ! ”

“ Ties for Colonel Templeton’s prize : Angela A’Court—Fenella Ferne ! ” proclaimed Miss Macdonald, at last obtaining silence for an announcement, and Cliff Dene School, having taken breath and recruited its energies during the brief pause, again yelled itself hoarse with cheering, as the two cousins marched up to the dais to receive Colonel Templeton’s prize, side by side.

CHAPTER XXI

A HOME-COMING

ANGELA and Fen were to go home with Aunt Frances and Aunt Rosalind that very evening when "The Dem" was over. Miss Macdonald had been very kind and said, "Well, perhaps this once."

So, as on that first occasion, it was in the evening that Fen came to Roswell Castle. Only now the soft, spring daylight lingered, and the windows of the car were open, and grandfather came down the steps to greet her without a hat.

He had been standing there waiting for the coming of the car for quite a long time, as Fen learned afterwards, and by his side, and looking quite at home and better than she had ever seen him, was daddy himself.

Grandfather waved his hand, and Fen flew out of the car before it had well stopped.

"We were both top in 'The Dem,' both Angela and me," she cried. "Isn't it lovely?"

"I don't know how it was managed, but it sounds an excellent arrangement," said Lord Roswell, with an arm round each.

Then Fen had to hug daddy tempestuously. "How absolutely *it* to have you here to come home to! Are you staying to-night?"

Grandfather smiled at his son-in-law. "Andrew, your father, is living here, my dear. We settled that some time ago, didn't we, Andrew?"

"Oh!" Fen said; and then "*Oh!*" again as the full significance of this was borne in upon her. "Then you don't mind about daddy and me being circus people any more?"

Grandfather smiled again. "I don't. I am far too glad to find a son and a granddaughter. And that point being settled, do you think you and I have time for a little walk before dinner?"

Fen put her hand into his. "Do let's, if Aunt Frances will let me off dressing?"

And so it was settled. Fen and her grandfather went off together.

"Where are we going?"

"The stables first," Lord Roswell said.

In a loose box a beautiful little bay mare turned her satin neck and whinnied at their approach.

A HOME-COMING

“Make friends with her, my dear, she is for you,” Lord Roswell said. “I shall look forward to a companion in my rides when you are home for the holidays.”

“Grandfather, you *are* a dear!” was all Fen could gasp out. “This beauty for my very own? I can’t believe it.”

She would have stayed for hours with the beautiful creature, but her grandfather hurried her away. It seemed that there was something else to see.

The South Lodge was the prettiest of all lodges, with roses climbing about its picturesque black and white timber and latticed window-panes. Fen had always admired it, and thought the old woman and her granddaughter who lived there both lucky folk. But she was rather surprised that it was to the South Lodge that grandfather took his way at this hour in the evening. It seemed an odd time to choose for visiting old Mrs. Marsh.

But Fen knew why she had been brought to the South Lodge directly they came in sight of the little garden, sweet just now with primroses and starry narcissi. For a little figure was bending over the flowers—she had not far to stoop—as though she could not drink in their beauty

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enough. It was Mademoiselle Mignon, though now she was dressed in clothes suited to her age, and her face was free from paint and had ceased to look wistful and unhappy.

She heard the footsteps and looked up, and next moment Fen was on her knees on the soft turf hugging the midget.

"I'm living here, my dear," Mademoiselle Mignon explained, "and so is Zuletta, and we're taking in dressmaking for the village and are as happy as the day is long. Your grandfather arranged for us to board with Mrs. Marsh, who has more rooms than she wants—and no more circuses for either of us any more."

Fen put her hand into her grandfather's. She couldn't thank him then. But on the way home she said softly: "I wonder whether mother knows?"

"What, my dear?" asked Lord Roswell.

"How glad I am now that I found out what was on the other side of the door."





